MORAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL

SUGGESTIONS

ON

VARIOUS SUBJECTS,

RELATIVE TO

HUMAN PERFECTION AND HAPPINESS.

DIDACTIC LECTURES.

IN FOUR VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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PREFACE.

THE teacher of Religion and Chriſtianity, is at the ſame time to the generality of men, the only teacher of wiſdom; and his diſcourſe the only, or, at leaſt, the ſureſt means of connecting whatever in human knowledge is ſerviceable to every man with the prevailing notions, and thereby of enriching the general ſtock of human knowledge. If he do this, in regard to ſuch doctrines of wiſdom as are particularly fruitful in arguments for contentedneſs and virtue, and the application and uſe whereof is various and eaſy; and if he do this, ſo as to

blend theſe doctrines with a great number of matters which daily preſent themſelves to mankind: then will he certainly act more conformably to his vocation, and perform more good, than if he deliver to his audience ſuch deep theories as are but little underſtood, explain abſtruſe aphoriſms, or dwell on what are called the myſteries of Religion.

And does not all, every thing, that leads a man to God, that inſpires him with joy in God, that makes his life become chearful and renders him wiſer and better, belong to Religion and to Chriſtianity, to that guide to the ſummit of human perfection and happineſs? All truth proceeds from God—is revelation of God; let the means by which

which we come to the knowledge of it be what they may.

Only no metaphyſical, unintelligible inveſtigations—only no doctrines that are more adapted to beget doubt than faith and certainty—only no demonſtration of matters which are already plain to every man of ſound intellects, or which cannot be demonſtrated in a public diſcourſe without danger—only no unfeeling, unaffecting mode of delivery—and then let every thing that relates to the whole extent of wiſdom be employed by the teacher of Religion; and then let him boldly draw from theſe ſources; and aſcribe all the light, all the comfort, all the pious joy, all the good actions, he thus diffuſes, quickens, or occaſions, to the ſpirit of

God, which is the ſpirit of truth and wiſdom!

Findeſt thou theſe reflections juſt, impartial reader; then will the ſubſequent, indeed very incomplete, conſiderations on natural and moral evil, appear to thee leſs ſtrange; and I ſhall ſtand excuſed to myſelf for having made choice of this ſubject for public diſcourſe. If they render thee ſatisfied with the works and arrangements of God; give thee more pleaſant proſpects of the lot of thine inheritance and that of thy brethren, and confirm thee in the reflection in which the whole of Religion conſiſts, that God is love: then is my object attained. And then may they give occaſion to other teachers, to draw out the ſubject into a fuller light, and extend it with more abun-

dant application to numberleſs incidents of life.

Of the other diſcourſes in this collection, nothing need be ſaid. They relate to important, and generally uſeful matters, which are but too ſeldom expreſsly handled in the pulpit.—Probably, O pious reader, thou thinkeſt differently from me, on the ſubject of public diverſions, of ſtage-repreſentations, and the like. Let each of us be ſure of his faith and of his meaning! No difference of opinion ſhould weaken our Chriſtian, our brotherly love! He, however, who perverts the truth, by holding that for good abſolutely and without limitations, which is only ſo under certain conditions and reſtrictions, muſt take the conſequences upon himſelf.

May

May the merciful God extend the bleſſing with which he has already accompanied theſe diſcourſes on their delivery, to all who ſhall herein peruſe them, and cauſe them to effect much Chriſtian wiſdom, and integrity, and bliſs!

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OF THE

EVILS

THAT ARE

IN THE WORLD.

His work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment. Deuteron. xxxii. 4.

OF THE EVILS THAT ARE IN THE WORLD.

SECTION THE FIRST.

TO render us ſatisfied with all the arrangements and diſpenſations of Providence; to enable us to rejoice in God and the connections we ſtand in with him, is the grand object of all the doctrines of religion and chriſtianity; to animate you to a glad and grateful enjoyment of his benefits, and thereby to make you better and happier; is the ultimate aim of all the

ideas of theſe doctrines we ſhall endeavour to collect. In this view it is, that we ſo frequently tell you, from the moſt intimate conviction, that God is ſupremely good, that he is love itſelf, that he governs his creatures with the utmoſt tenderneſs and indulgence, that he judges them with the moſt perfect equity, that he is more inclined to bleſs than to puniſh, and in all that he commands or forbids, in all that he gives or denies, he ſeeks their happineſs alone. This is no leſs true than that he is God; and I know of no other way of becoming really pious and happy, and of conſtantly continuing pious and happy, than the lively knowledge and ſteady application of theſe truths to all our fortunes and actions, to all that we are and do, and all that happens to us.

At the ſame time, mankind are but too much diſpoſed to call theſe truths in queſtion; and the oftener and more forcibly they doubt of them, ſo much the farther

are

are they from the way of piety and happineſs. Theſe doubts, however, chiefly ariſe from the conſideration and ſentiment of the manifold evils, natural and moral, that exiſt in the world and among mankind. Theſe evils they cannot always reconcile with the ſupreme goodneſs of God, with his infinite benevolence towards the human race. They rather ſeem to be the arrangements and diſpenſations of an auſtere deſpotic ſovereign, than of a tender and indulgent parent; to be more the effects of indifference or ſeverity, than the conſequences of unbounded love.

How feeble, it is ſaid, how circumſcribed in all reſpects is man! How many wants is he encumbered with, and how difficult to be ſupplied! How many unpleaſant, repugnant, noxious impreſſions are made on him by outward things! How often does he exert his powers in vain! How often does he labour for nought! How often

ten does he miſs of his aims! How many cares, how much trouble and ſorrow are mixed with the ſhort and fleeting ſatisfactions of his life! How many dangers and misfortunes, how many pains and ſickneſſes lie in wait to torment him! And how frequently does he fall a prey to the treachery of error, the deluſions of vice, to the loweſt and moſt deſtructive paſſions! What devaſtation and havoc are committed by folly and ſin in domeſtic, in civil, in human ſociety! What crimes, what cruelties, are not perpetrated among mankind? And how dreadful is death, which terminates this long ſeries of evils! How can a Being, who is poſſeſſed at once of ſovereign power and infinite love, who loves mankind with more than parental tenderneſs, ordain or allow all this to happen?

Thus does a man but too frequently reflect, in thoſe gloomy hours or moments when he is prevented from ſeeing clearly

and from judging impartially, by ſome diſagreeable feeling, or ſome adverſe event. Thus he doubts of the foremoſt, the moſt decided truth, the truth, that God is love; and thus is his belief in this truth, which ought always to govern and guide him, impaired, and, at leaſt for ſome time, rendered unfruitful. Happy ſhould I be, could I remove theſe doubts from you, or arm you ſo much againſt them as to enable you to come off with conqueſt in the hour of temptation and misfortune! This however cannot better be effected than by cool

Reflections on the things we call evils, and which likewiſe are evils.

You know, that all the evils in the world are uſually divided into two claſſes or ſpecies. The one is called phyſical or natural, the other moral evil. By the former are underſtood ſuch evils as do not depend

on our moral conduct, on our good or bad ſentiments and actions, but are grounded in our nature and frame, and in the contexture of the things and circumſtances among which we are placed. On the other hand, by the latter, are implied, ſuch evils as ſolely or principally proceed from our irregular behaviour, from our wicked diſpoſitions and actions. Not of theſe, but of the former, we will now diſcourſe. Let us therefore conſider what is termed natural evil, and examine how we are to regard it for forming a right judgment of it, and for reconciling it with the ſovereign goodneſs of God.

Ignorance, error, weakneſs, pain, variety of wants, toilſome labour, bad ſucceſs of it, unfortunate events, ſenſibility to hoſtile impreſſions from without, oppoſition, hindrances and difficulties in what we deſign and execute, ſickneſs, deſtruction and death: theſe and the like things are called natural evils.

evils. For rightly judging whereof, we will now endeavour to ſet two axioms in a proper light.

The firſt is: Many things which we call evils, are merely the neceſſary circumſpections of our nature and powers.

The ſecond: Many others are ſalutary cautions againſt far greater evils.

Firſt, then, there are many things which we call evils, and yet which, conſidered in and of themſelves alone, are no more than the neceſſary limitations of our nature and powers; and he that complains of theſe evils, complains that he is a man, and what is that but complaining that man exiſts? Man is man; I repeat it, Man is man. This, little as it may ſeem to ſay, is expreſſive of much. Man is therefore, on one hand, no ſtone, no plant, no mere machine, not ſimply animal; but ſo likewiſe

wiſe is he, on the other hand, no pure ſpirit, no angel, no ſtill higher being. As little then as the properties of a ſtone, of a plant, of an irrational animal would ſuit him; juſt ſo little alſo would the privileges or the powers of a ſpirit, a ſuperior being, not united with a body ſo organized as ours, or with one more perfect, be adapted to him. Man can therefore not poſſeſs all intellect, but only the intellect of a man; not all ſenſation, but only the ſenſation of a man; not all ſagacity, but only the ſagacity of a man; not all knowledge and penetration, but only the knowledge and penetration of a man; not all mechanical or mental power, but only the powers of a man. To ſuch a being, ſuit only certain and no other properties, only certain and no other capacities, only certain and no other privileges and powers, only a certain and no other mode of exiſtence, of life, of happineſs. As the lamb cannot have the ſtrength of the lion, or the mole the keen

keen and far-piercing eye of the eagle, ſince the lamb is a lamb, and the mole a mole; or, ſince among the creatures of God, there muſt be lambs and moles: ſo neither can man have the intellect or the ſtrength of a ſuperior being, which probably can ſurvey the univerſe entire, and ſet whole worlds in motion, ſince man is man; or, ſince among the innumerable works of God, mankind muſt alſo be. And, were there no ſuch creatures as we, were there only more perfect beings; then we ſhould not exiſt, but other, more perfect creatures, in our place; we therefore ſhould not be at all. And what intelligent man, on calm reflection, could wiſh that this were the caſe?

This one conſideration will teach us to regard many things, which we call evils, in another point of view, and ſhew us, that they are nothing but the conſequences of the neceſſary circumſcription of our nature

and

and our capacities; that they are things which cannot but be, if in the world of God there ſhould be men, or beings capable of human perfection, and of enjoying human happineſs. To this claſs belong unimputable ignorance, unavoidable error, natural infirmity, want or privation of powers. All theſe are undoubtedly imperfections; and if we chuſe to call every imperfection an evil, then theſe are evils: but they are only imperfections and evils abſtractedly conſidered, and not in regard to us, who are, what as men we can and ought to be, and who, as men, cannot be any other. With what right then can we complain of this, or reproach the divine goodneſs with it?

Thou repineſt at thy lot, O man; thou deemeſt it an imperfection, an evil; thinkeſt truly that it militates with the goodneſs of thy Creator, that thou art ignorant in many reſpects; that ſuch numbers of objects

jects in heaven and on earth, in the intellectual and in the material world, lie totally hid from thee; that of ſo many others thou canſt only ſcan the ſurface, diſcover a few of their effects, but not dive into the interior of their eſſence, not ſcrutinize their primitive component parts, their powers, their mode of operation; not ſee their combinations, and the links of their connection. Thou mighteſt indeed have been ſo conſtituted as to know all things, to comprehend all things, connect the paſt and the future together, forget nothing, ſurvey all things at one ſingle glance, and perceive in the cleareſt light what is at preſent impenetrable myſtery to thee. But then muſt thou have had quite other ſenſible organs, a quite other body, a quite other mind; then muſt thou not have been a man. As a man, who is therefore a man, becauſe he has ſuch a body and no other, ſuch and no other organs of ſenſe, ſuch and no other intellectual powers; as ſuch thou

thou canſt poſſeſs only a certain fixt proportion of ſenſation, of underſtanding, of ſagacity, of memory, and the like; and this proportion cannot extend ſo far, as to comprehend all things, to fathom all things, to retain all things. Therefore, either thou muſt be a man, and conſequently be ignorant in very many matters, or thou muſt not be at all.

Thou repineſt farther, peremptorily conſidereſt it as an evil, thinkeſt, truly, that it militates with the goodneſs of thy Creator, that thou ſo eaſily and ſo often erreſt in the very things which thou knoweſt and mayeſt underſtand, that thou makeſt ſo many falſe concluſions, ſo often changeſt thy opinion, and art ſo frequently obliged to revoke thy judgement; thou mighteſt, at leaſt, proceed unimpeded on the way of knowledge that lies open before thee, and not meet with ſo many checks, and obſcurities, and by-paths upon it. But even this

this imperfection, this evil, if thou chuſeſt to give it that name, is a neceſſary effect of the limitation which makes thee a man. He who cannot ſurvey all things, cannot diſcern much more than the ſurface of things, can only judge of particular parts of the whole, but not of their connection, muſt of neceſſity often err, often judge falſely, often with partiality, and often take appearance for truth. Either, therefore, thou muſt be a man, and conſequently a fallible creature, a creature in many reſpects liable to miſtake; or, thou muſt not be at all.

Thou repineſt, in fine, and holdeſt it, probably, for an evil at variance with the ſovereign goodneſs of thy Maker, that thy powers extend no farther, that they are ſo ſpeedily exhauſted, that thou art wearied on every exertion, that the ſphere of thy movement, thy activity, is ſo narrow, that it is bounded by impediments in the material

rial world. Thou would'ſt therefore act without all moleſtation, at thy good pleaſure change the courſe of things, overturn mountains, new-model the globe, create worlds of thy own, and reduce every wiſh into action. But all this demands a quite different body from thine, a quite different intellect from thine, a quite different ſtation from thine; and then would'ſt thou not be a man: thou would'ſt therefore not be, and could'ſt even not do, not accompliſh, not enjoy that little, which at preſent thou canſt do, and accompliſh, and enjoy.

Forget not, therefore, that thou art no angel, that thou art a man; that as ſuch thou muſt have a certain limitation, and even this and no other limitation; and that very many things which thou calleſt evils are nothing but the natural, unavoidable effects of this limitation. Be thankful then to God, the Supremely Bountiful, for this, that he did not barely create ſuperior beings, but alſo man; thank him for this,

that

that thou art, that thou canſt think, judge, effect, and act, but long not, fooliſhly, to think, to judge, to effect, and to act otherwiſe than as a man; and rejoice thyſelf herein, that, even as a man, not indeed at once, but yet by little and little, thou canſt and wilt be ever enlarging the ſphere of thy knowledge and of thy activity, and become by degrees what thou art not now and cannot be.

The ſecond axiom, conducive to the paſſing a right judgement on the evil that is in the world, and to the confirmation of our faith in the ſupreme goodneſs of our Creator and Father, is this: Many things which we call evils, and which in certain reſpects deſerve that name, are nothing elſe than wholeſome cautions againſt far greater evils; and which, were it not for them, we muſt neceſſarily undergo.—Thus bodily pain is certainly a diſagreeable ſenſation, a diſagreeable mode

of exiſtence; it is in this conſideration an evil; and it would be ridiculous for us to deny it, by maintaining, with ſome ſingular perſons among the antients, that we may be as tranquil and happy under theſe ſenſations as without them, or that pain is not pain. But this is likewiſe certain, that pain is a caution againſt ſtill greater evils, and that, conſidered on this ſide, it is, or may be, an advantage to us.

Thou haſt, for example, O man, thou haſt exceeded the bounds of moderation in eating and drinking. This, of neceſſity, muſt cauſe diſorder in thy body; it muſt beget a noxious and corrupted juice, deſtroy the equilibrium, or the reciprocal action of its ſolids and fluids, give too ſtrong a tenſion to the one, and render the other too ſluggiſh, &c. and this is ſo unavoidable, ſo implicated in the nature of the human body, that we ſhould not be the creatures we are, if this were not the caſe.—Suppoſe

poſe now that theſe diſarrangements occaſioned thee no pain, no unpleaſing ſenſation. What would the conſequence be? They would remain in thy body without thy knowledge, would be always growing greater and more various, would ſpread farther and farther, till at length they would wholly deſtroy thy health, and put an end to thy life. Now that they are accompanied with pain, thou art informed by this pain, that ſomething paſſes in thy body which is not congenial, that may be deſtructive to it; it warns thee of this deſtruction, it prompts thee to think on means for preventing its progreſs; thou uſeſt theſe means, abſtaineſt from whatever it was that cauſed this diſorder, applieſt thyſelf to the rules of temperance, and thus thou remaineſt exempt from greater evils, thus thou recovereſt thy health and thy powers again; and thus wilt thou no longer conſider pain, however unpleaſant it may be, abſolutely as an evil, but as

the warning voice of a friend, that indeed flatters thee not, but yet means thee well, and is ſollicitous for thy welfare and advantage.

So alſo is it with the diſagreeable, the painful conſequences, by which wrath, voluptuouſneſs, every inordinate, violent paſſion is attended in our body. They are warnings of ſtill greater evils. They are powerful incentives to become better and happier. What indiſpoſitions, what ravages, would not ſuch paſſions occaſion, not only in the man who is addicted to them, but likewiſe in other perſons with whom he is connected, if the man himſelf did not ſuffer under them, if their impetuoſity were not tempered by painful ſenſations, if we were not impelled by them to beware of their firſt attack! Long, long ago would all ſocial pleaſures have been deſtroyed, and ſociety itſelf have fallen to the

the ground, had we been deſtitute of ſuch forcible ſuggeſtions and reſtraints.

Does pain then come upon thee, O man; haſt thou the unpleaſant idea of undermining decay in thy body; yet murmur not againſt the Moſt High; doubt not of his goodneſs, at the very time he is giving thee freſh indications of it. Much rather confeſs, in this very pain, the voice of thy Father, warning his wandering child, who merely inflicts theſe diſagreeable ſenſations, not for the ſake of making him ſuffer, but, becauſe this is the beſt, the only way of averting from him ſufferings ſtill more ſevere, and even of ſecuring him from theſe lighter ſorrows, if he will but hearken to this warning voice, and follow it with conſtant obedience.

Indeed there are likewiſe pains endured by man, which contribute to deſtroy his body, and which therefore cannot be conſidered

as mere ſuggeſtions. But commonly theſe are owing to our diſobedience to former more gentle, more mild ſuggeſtions, and therefore are to be imputed to nothing but our own faulty and perverſe behaviour; and we ought not to complain of evils we bring upon ourſelves as of injuſtice and wrong. Are there, however, ſome few caſes of a man's meeting with ſuch deſtructive pains without all guilt of his own; then they belong to thoſe evils, but for the poſſibility of which we ſhould be deprived of a thouſand ineſtimable advantages, or which exerciſe us in virtue, and bring us nearer to ſpiritual perfection; a point of view in a two-fold manner important, from whence, in the next ſection, we ſhall contemplate natural evil. At preſent we muſt make yet a few more remarks on what fall under the denomination of pain.

What is true of bodily pain, or ſuch as ariſes from the ſtate of the body, holds good

good likewiſe of mental pain, or ſuch as is founded merely in the images of the mind. Diſguſt, trouble, vexation, grief, ſhame, diſappointed hope, is mental pain. They are certainly unpleaſant, painful ſenſations that ariſe, when a man ſees that he has miſtaken the truth, and has plunged into error, that he has entered upon fooliſh and hurtful affairs, or has executed good undertakings badly. They are unpleaſant, painful ſenſations that ariſe when a man, by or without his own fault, fails in his deſigns, muſt forego his purpoſes, errs in his ſuppoſitions and his expectations; when a man has allowed himſelf to be over-reached by the cheat, blinded by the flatterer, deceived by the falſe friend; when he loſes the outward diſtinctions and goods in which he made the whole of his happineſs to conſiſt, or reckoned as an eſſential part of it; when a man renders his own character contemptible by eaſily avoidable follies and weakneſſes. All theſe, and a hundred other

things of the ſame kind, to a man of a feeling heart, may be as painful, and ſtill more ſo, than the indiſpoſitions and diſtempers that ariſe in his body. But even this pain, how deeply ſoever it may wound us, is not abſolutely bad in itſelf. Even this pain is an admonition, a neceſſary wholeſome admonition, to beware of greater evils. Its tendency is, to make us careful in the inveſtigation of truth; conſiderate in our concluſions and undertakings; circumſpect in the choice of our friends and familiars, in the proſecution of our deſigns, in the application of the means thereto; attentive to the whole of our conduct, and even to the leaſt of our actions; modeſt in our judgments and expectations; moderate and temperate in the enjoyment of our fortunes. Were it not for theſe painful ſenſations, we ſhould be ever adding error to error, failing to failing, be deceived by every ſemblance, become the prey and the ſport of every impoſtor, be conſtantly judg-

ing and acting with greater raſhneſs and folly, ever be flattered by idle hopes, and never become prudent and wiſe.

Accordingly, when thou perceiveſt, O man, that thou haſt been overtaken by error, that thou haſt drawn a falſe concluſion, haſt made a wrong ſtep, haſt placed too great a confidence in thyſelf or others, and art deceived in thy expectations; doſt thou feel thereby aſhamed, does this give thee pain, does it cauſe thee trouble and grief? Yet complain not of theſe ſenſations, as of things that are abſolutely bad in themſelves, or which men, whom God loves, ought not to encounter. No; they are the voice of ſovereign wiſdom and goodneſs, which calls thee to ſtop ſhort in thy errors, to diſentangle thyſelf from them, tells thee wherein thou art miſtaken, and of what thou art henceforward to beware; it is a prerogative of thy nature, that thou canſt conſider, bethink thyſelf better, obſerve

ſerve the conſequences of thy actions and the actions of other men, rectify thy judgments, and alter and improve thy conduct. Do but ſcrutinize at all times the cauſes, the occaſions of thy diſmay, the grounds of thy diſappointment or of thy ſhame: ſo wilt thou aſſuredly learn wiſdom from the reſearch; ſo will the ſources of uneaſineſs and grief become conſtantly leſs to thee; ſo wilt thou ever more ſafely purſue thy courſe, ever more eaſily comfort thyſelf on the loſs of externals, leſs frequently miſs of thy aims, ever more clearly confeſs the ſupport and goodneſs of thy heavenly Father, and ſo will even theſe evils become benefits to thee.

SECTION II.

THE more evils there are, or are thought to exiſt, in the world: ſo much the more important is it to judge rightly of them; ſo much the leſs indifferent ought we to be in reſpect to any thing that may ſmoothen or facilitate the way to this right judgment. Do we multiply or magnify theſe evils in our ideas; do we ſeparate them from the manifold advantages from whence they proceed, and which again ariſe from them; do we accuſtom ourſelves to attend more to the bad than to the good that ſubſiſts in the world: then ſhall we neither think juſtly of God, nor of the world, nor of ourſelves; neither love God with all our heart and with all our ſoul, nor enjoy our own exiſtence and appoint-

ment, nor rejoice in the goods of this world, with a chriſtian and chearful mind. The recollection of the paſt will produce in us diſguſt; the idea of the preſent, diſcontent and uneaſineſs; the proſpect of the future, diſquiet and vexation. The thoughts of God will be dreadful to us, his work will ſeem faulty, his ways unrighteous, his demands ſevere, his chaſtiſements grievous; duty and virtue will be troubleſome to us, the comforts and joys of life inſipid, and life itſelf a burden. We ſhall regard this earth as the abode of ſorrow, of pain, and miſery; and its rational inhabitants as ſolely devoted to diſtreſs. And how unjuſt muſt ſuch a way of thinking render us towards God and man, how ſlothful to all goodneſs, how ſenſible to every adverſe event, how diſmayed at every danger; how wicked and unhappy muſt it make us!

Guard yourſelves from this way of thinking, by adopting and cheriſhing the leſ-

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ſons of wiſdom, which are able to ſecure you from it. Accuſtom yourſelves to reflect coolly and impartially, on what are called evils, and really are ſo, that you may learn to conſider them in their connection with the faultleſs whole to which they belong, and to combine them with the ſovereign goodneſs of God, and our vocation to happineſs. To ſet you forward in theſe reflections, and to exerciſe you in them, is the purport of my preſent undertaking. May it tend to the praiſe of the divine goodneſs, and to the advancement of a pious joy in God and all his works and diſpenſations!

When we firſt took this ſubject in hand, a fortnight ago, we divided all the evils that are in the world into two claſſes or ſpecies, namely, into natural and moral. Of the former, I mean of natural evils, we diſcourſed at that time; of the latter we ſhall now ſay ſomething, and, if it

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pleaſe God, again hereafter. For rightly judging of them, we have already learnt to regard two main propoſitions as true. The firſt was: Many things which we call evils, are merely the neceſſary conſequences of the limitation of our nature and our power, which makes man what he is; and he that complains of this evil, complains that he is a man, or, which is exactly the ſame thing, that he, and not another, more perfect being in his ſtead, is thus ſtationed in the world of God. Hereto belong ignorance, error, weakneſs, limited activity, in ſo far as they are grounded in the natural frame and the natural condition of man. The other axiom was: Many things which we call evils, and which likewiſe, conſidered in and of themſelves, deſerve that name, are nothing elſe than ſalutary warnings of far greater evils, and which, were it not for them, we muſt inevitably undergo. Thus it is, as we then diſcovered, with almoſt all corporeal pains, or ſuch as ori-

originate in the ſtate of the body, as well as with all mental pains, or ſuch as derive their origin from the ideas of the intellect. They make us feel in a diſagreeable manner the indiſpoſitions and diſorders which have ariſen in our body, or in our outward well-being, or in our reflecting ſyſtem; but, were it not for this ſenſation, thoſe indiſpoſitions and diſorders would not be removed, and would draw after them ſtill more prejudicial effects.

We now advance a ſtep farther, and ſhall endeavour to bring three other propoſitions into light.

The firſt is: Many things which we call evils, are means to advantages that far outweigh them, or conditions and ground-works, without which we muſt forego theſe advantages.

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The ſecond is: Many others are only the neceſſary cauſes and incentives to the developement and exhibition of our powers.

The third is: Others again promote our moral improvement, and exerciſe us in virtue.

I ſay, firſt, that many things, which we call evils, are means to advantages that far outweigh them, or conditions and groundworks, without which we muſt forego theſe advantages. Hereto belong the whole ſtate of weakneſs and dependency of our childhood, and the firſt years of youth. That man, at his entrance into the world, ſhould be ſo feeble, and liable to ſo many accidents, that for ſo long a time he ſhould neither be able to ſtand nor to go, nor to feed and defend himſelf without extraneous aid; depend ſo long for his ſupport, his health, his pleaſures, on the will and providence

vidence of his parents and tutors; be ſo long under their correction and controul, and be denied the free uſe of his powers; that he, the lord of the earth, muſt, in theſe reſpects, be below the generality of beaſts: how often have the diſcontented or the ungrateful complained! how often have theſe matters been made the prime articles in the long catalogue of evils by which man is encompaſſed and perſecuted from the cradle to the grave! But then is the uſe of the underſtanding and reaſon, is the intellectual perfection to which we are by theſe means raiſed, no good? Is it not the greateſt, the nobleſt prerogative of our nature? But can man ever become intelligent and rational, unleſs he live in ſociety with others, receive inſtruction from them, and be cloſely connected with them? And would he live with them in ſociety, in orderly, intimate ſociety, and allow himſelf to be guided and inſtructed by them, if he had no need of them, if, like the inferior

animals, he were independent on his parents in a ſhort time after his death, and were ſufficient to himſelf for his ſupport? —Therefore, thou muſt either, O thou who ſeeſt nothing but unqualified evil around thee, thou muſt either maintain, that man were more happy to have remained an animal, than he at preſent can be as a rational creature; or thou muſt no longer pretend that ſtate of childiſh infirmity and dependance to be an evil, but confeſs it the beſt means of bringing man to the uſe of his underſtanding and reaſon, and thereby of rendering him actually a man.

The caſe is exactly the ſame with very many diſagreeable, adverſe, and hurtful impreſſions and effects, which outward things produce on us, or on our organs of ſenſe. We are more or leſs ſenſible to heat and froſt, to every change of weather, to every alteration of the atmoſphere. One while

while we feel the ſcorching rays of the ſummer's ſun, and then ſhudder with the cold of the winter months. We ſee, we hear, we feel numberleſs things without us, that are diſpleaſing or noxious to us. Every part, and member, and joint of our body, may very eaſily, and by various means, be diſlocated, ſhattered, broken, torn, maimed, hurt, and rendered uſeleſs. All theſe accidents may cauſe us pain, deſtructive pain. Were our organs of ſenſe leſs delicate, our ſenſes more obtuſe, our ſkin tough and impenetrable, our bodies hard as iron; then indeed the greateſt part of theſe evils would not exiſt. But how much, how infinitely much, ſhould we be loſers thereby! What advantages, what over-balancing advantages, do we not receive from the admirable articulation, flexibility, and ſenſibility of every part and member of our body! What is there that a man cannot perform barely with his hand and his fingers? How far is he, even by this alone, exalted above

the beaſts of the field! What works of art he brings to effect! And what variety, what nice combinations and changes of the pleaſures of ſight, of hearing, of ſmell, of taſte, of feeling, do our organs of ſenſe enable us to enjoy, which we ſhould not be capable of, were they leſs tender and delicate! But, would we enjoy theſe advantages and pleaſures, then muſt we likewiſe put up with thoſe diſpleaſures and evils; that which renders the one poſſible, renders poſſible the other alſo; the ſame wiſe and good conſtitution of our body and its adaptation to outward things makes us ſuſceptible of both; and he who ſhould require the one and yet not be liable to the other, would require incompatible things; he would require that his ſenſes ſhould poſſeſs feeling to a certain degree, and yet not have that feeling to the ſame degree; that his limbs ſhould be pliable, his ſkin tender, and yet invulnerable, that is, not pliable and not tender; that outward things ſhould

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act upon him, and yet not act upon him. It is therefore abſolutely undeniable, that many things which we call evils, are deſirable means to far over-balancing advantages, or are conditions and ground-works, without which we muſt forego theſe advantages. And who can hold ſuch things for poſitive evils?

Secondly, many other things, which we reckon evils, are only neceſſary and ſalutary occaſions and incentives to the development and exertion of our powers. Man comes into the world without cloathing; he muſt provide himſelf with it. He enters the liſts, as it were, without either ſhield or weapons; he muſt learn to procure, to adjuſt, and to uſe them. He has many wants, and his wants are ever increaſing: nature does not immediately ſupply them; ſhe barely affords him the materials thereto; he muſt work them up, and adapt them to his uſe. His field bears

thiſtles and thorns; brings forth bad or ſcanty proviſions; he muſt cleanſe it from the weed, and render it more prolific and productive, by toilſome induſtry. And how often do blighting winds, noxious inſects, and direful inundations, defeat the purpoſes of his moſt aſſiduous labour! He finds oppoſition and impediment on every ſide, which he cannot overcome without toil, nor remove without diligence.—He has a curioſity for knowledge which nothing can ſatisfy, which he cannot totally, and not without the greateſt exertion of his faculties, content. He muſt labour, if he will live; labour, if he will procure cloathing and the conveniences of life; labour, if he would defend himſelf from his enemies; labour, if he would acquire the means of pleaſure; labour, if he would govern his luſts and paſſions; labour, if he would allow them their fill. Every thing coſts him, more or leſs, reflection, induſtry, toil, exertion. What evils,

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what torments! exclaim the diſſatiſfied.

But how? Can this be pure evil, abſolutely evil? How could man, without theſe wants, this oppoſition, theſe dangers, this curioſity, without theſe powerful incitements to ſenſibility, to induſtry, to diligence, to the exertion of his faculties, be and become that which, as a rational creature, he ought to be and to become? Let man bring his cloathing into the world with him, like the beaſts; ſet him in ſecurity againſt all dangers; ſurround him with all that he wants for his ſupport, and let him find it exactly when he wants it; deprive him of his inquiſitiveneſs; let him meet with no hindrances and no oppoſition: and how far will you raiſe him above the animal ſtate? How much nearer will you bring him to the venerable image of a perfect man? Will he indeed acquire a clearer conſciouſneſs of himſelf, fully en-

joy exiſtence and life? Will he learn to think reaſonably, to conſider, to act with forecaſt, to look beyond the preſent, to form extenſive plans, and to proſecute them with wiſdom and firmneſs? Will not almoſt all his mental faculties lie dormant? What ſhall awake them? What ſet them in movement, and keep them in action? Can we, then, call that which procures mankind all theſe advantages, unfolds and exerciſes his powers, leads him to the ends of his being, renders him capable of a higher perfection and happineſs, can we call that abſolute evil?

No; many will probably think, that labour, the exertion of our powers, is good to a man, is properly no evil; yet, that he ſhould ſo frequently labour in vain, muſt ſo often exert his powers to no end, this is certainly however a real and great evil. But even this ſentiment too is falſe. We never labour abſolutely in vain, never exert

exert our powers utterly for nought, when we ſeem, as it were, to execute nothing by them, when as it were we bring nothing to effect without us, procure ourſelves neither bread, nor riches, nor honour, nor the pleaſure of doing good to others; ſtill we are always exercifing our powers, and by exerciſe they become more ſtrong and more perfect; and this is real, laſting benefit. Take my preſent, or any other religious diſcourſe, for example. My view in it is, of all things, to become ſerviceable to you. That is the wiſh of my whole heart. I likewiſe hope, ſometimes more and ſometimes leſs aſſuredly, that I am ſo; and whatever weakens this hope is unpleaſant to me. But ſuppoſe, that none of you reap benefit from my diſcourſe; yet have I not totally laboured in vain. I have thereby exerted my mental faculties, exerciſed them by reflection, by exerciſe made them more perfect; and this degree of perfection, be it ſmall or great, will remain

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to me for ever.—The ſame holds good of all that we do, when that which we do is right and good, and we do it in a rational manner, with reflection and conſideration. There are therefore very many things, which we account evils, that are nothing elſe but neceſſary and wholeſome occaſions and incitements, to the unfolding and diſplay of our powers.

No leſs certain is it, thirdly, that, many things which we call evils, and which, conſidered in and of themſelves, are not only in general means and incitations to the developement and exertion of all our powers, but are alſo in particular very much adapted to the furtherance of our moral improvement, and to exerciſe us in virtue. This exerciſe will be neceſſary even for men, who are not ſinners, but yet men, that is, creatures ſo, and no otherwiſe framed and limited, neceſſarily muſt be, if they are to become gradually more perfect. No limited creature can all at once attain

attain to that degree of virtue, of which, conſidered in and of itſelf and according to the whole compaſs of its exiſtence, it is capable of attaining. But, is it gradually to become more and more virtuous, more and more expert in all goodneſs? Then can this be no otherwiſe effected than by practice. And to this practice, occaſions and incentives, obſtacles to be overcome, difficulties to be encountered, are neceſſary; and theſe obſtacles, theſe difficulties, ſeem to be evils, and alſo are evils when taken in a certain light, as they cauſe us at firſt diſagreeable ſenſations and unpleſant ideas. But which is better; To have the diſagreeable ſenſations and ideas, and by them to become more perfect, or to be exempted from them, but ever to remain at the loweſt pitch of moral goodneſs?

And thus it is with a thouſand things which we call evils. Every man of probity may, on account of his bearing open teſtimony to the truth, experience oppoſi-

tion and ſcorn, loſe his poſts and his dignities, be deprived of many advantages and comforts of life. But he will learn to love and revere the truth, as truth, and to prefer the confeſſion of it to his outward well-being; and when he has once learnt this, when he has thus brought himſelf nearer to the ſuperior ſpirits, and to the Father of all ſpirits, will he regard that loſs as any real evil?—Such an one, by a wiſe, prudent, temperate and affectionate behaviour, may have many traverſes, many ſorrows, many afflictions to undergo; muſt be often contradicted by fools; may be ſurrounded by perſons of violent, implacable, uncomplying diſpoſitions; muſt meet with a hundred impediments in all that he undertakes. But this will promote his advancement in meekneſs, in ſelf-command, in patience, in firmneſs, in readineſs to forgive, and in greatneſs of mind; and if he attains to a more exalted degree in theſe generous ſentiments, in theſe vir-

tuous aptitudes, will any of thoſe ſufferings appear to him as abſolute evils?—Such an one may experience many misfortunes that are not of his own procuring, fall into many perils, ſee his beſt ſchemes defeated, and in regard to every thing future live in more than common uncertainty. But he will truſt in God, repoſe in the will of his Providence, be guided wholly by him, ſeek his happineſs more in him than in any thing elſe, learn to adapt himſelf to his circumſtances, and to be contented under all events; and when he has learnt this, has exerciſed himſelf therein, how much will his ſpirit have gained, what permanent felicity will he reap from it hereafter!—— Another labours with unabated ſincerity, with indefatigable zeal for the general good, and is repaid with ingratitude for it. But he will therefore think and act the more diſintereſtedly; he will love and do good, becauſe it is good, and learn to be ſatisfied with the conſciouſneſs of his integrity and the good-

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pleaſure of God; and when he has learnt this by its means, will that ingratitude, however deeply it may have wounded him at firſt, be a real, a durable evil to him?

In like manner, by the loſs of their fortunes, many may be ſecured from the exceſſes of luxury, and be taught moderation, induſtry, and content; ſome may ſuffer unmerited vexations, whereby they learn not to be vain and proud, and by vanity and pride to be hurtful to themſelves and to others: one may ſee himſelf deprived of the perſon, the friend, the earthly good, whereon his whole heart was ſet; by this his deſires take a better direction, and he acquires a nobler, a more heavanly mind: another may more than once in his life have ſtood on the verge of the grave, and felt the horror of approaching diſſolution; whereby he has been brought acquainted with the ſentiment of death and its conſequences, and is thence become wiſer and better.

better. And what reflecting man will hold things for abſolutely bad, which may and ſhould have ſuch effects, and in numberleſs caſes actually have them, how diſagreeable and painful ſoever they in and of themſelves may be?

No; no; God's wiſe goodneſs knows it to be a principal requiſite in human nature, by ſufferings and exerciſe to become more perfect. Therefore it was that he allowed ſo many unmerited and grievous ſufferings to fall to the lot of his ſon Jeſus, whom he ordained to be the pattern of the higheſt human perfection, to meet with ſo much contradiction and oppoſition, and his whole life on earth to be one continued exerciſe of temperance, of ſelf-denial, of ſacrifice, of fortitude. Therefore, he ſtill allows ſo many righteous to ſtruggle with miſery, ſo many innocent to be perſecuted and oppreſſed, not that they may ſuffer, not for cauſing them diſagreeable and painful

ful feelings,—how can God torture them whom he eminently loves?—no; to bring them nearer to perfection, and to render them capable of a higher felicity; and, if this be the conſequence of their ſufferings, the conſequences of the evil that overtakes them, will they complain of theſe ſufferings, ſtill hold theſe evils for ſomething at variance with the ſupreme goodneſs of their God?

Wouldſt thou therefore, O man, thou who thinkeſt thou perceiveſt ſo much evil on all ſides, learn to form a right judgement of theſe evils, and make them tolerable and eaſy to thee; then deeply imprint theſe leſſons of wiſdom on thy heart, and conſtantly apply them to thy own ſituation, thy portion in life.

Frequently revolve in thy mind the pleaſures which thy organs of ſenſe procure thee, enjoy them with conſciouſneſs, with

with conſideration, and with a chearful heart, and compare therewith the diſagreeable or painful ſenſations they at times occaſion: ſo wilt thou ſhortly find how far theſe are outweighed by thoſe, and how much thou would'ſt loſe if thou wert deprived of the former on account of the latter.

Conſider all the wants for which thou muſt provide, with toil, and at times with trouble, all the obſtacles and difficulties with which thou art beſet in whatever thou art purpoſed to do, all the works and affairs which demand exertion and induſtry, even all the attempts and labours which do not proſper in thy hands, all the wiſe and good actions which thou believeſt thou haſt done in vain; conſider them all, as what they truly are, as means and incitements to the developement of thy powers, to render thee more expert in applying them, to make thee rational and wiſe, and thereby to promote thy ſpiritual perfection,—which

alone, which is wholly thine, and remains thy own—for ever: ſo will moſt of the hardſhips and incumbrances of this life alter their form in thy eyes, and ceaſe from being evils to thee.

Laſtly, forget not, that without virtue there is no permanent felicity, and without exerciſe no human virtue, and that this exerciſe preſuppoſes afflictions and croſſes, and that therefore theſe afflictions and croſſes are not abſolutely bad, that they may be benefits to us, the means to higher perfection. And when thou confeſſeſt this, and confeſſeſt it with inward conviction, then wilt thou no longer be oppreſſed with the burden of life, the multitude of real or imaginary evils will no more perplex thee; thou wilt no longer miſdeem of God and his ſovereign goodneſs, thou wilt love and revere him as the moſt tender and bountiful Father, be ſatisfied with all his arrangements and diſpenſations, hold his will in

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all things for the beſt, and ſay, with a heart full of ſentiment, in the words of the prophet: "His work is perfect: for all his ways are judgement!"

SECTION III.

IN two foregoing ſections we have reflected on the natural evils that are in the world, and endeavoured to repreſent their real frame, their deſigns, and their connection with the divine goodneſs and with our felicity. Theſe conſiderations have taught us, that many things which we call evils, and which, in and of themſelves conſidered, are properly ſo called, are no more than the neceſſary conſequences of the limitation which makes man to be what he is; that others are ſalutary warnings againſt far greater evils; that a third ſort are indiſſolubly united to far overbalancing advantages and comforts, which we muſt otherwiſe forego; that a fourth

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claſs are occaſions and incentives to the developement of our faculties and to the furtherance of our ſpiritual perfection; and that, laſtly, a fifth order are means to our moral improvement and exerciſe in virtue. To theſe claſſes of things, which we call evils, we have particularly referred: the unimputable ignorance, the unavoidable errors, the circumſcribed activity of man, the generality of his painful ſenſations, the diſagreeable impreſſion made by outward things on his tender and delicate organs of ſenſe, and the great irritability of his body, the ſtate of weakneſs and dependency of our childhood and firſt years of youth, our various wants, toilſome works and often apparently uſeleſs exertions of our powers, and laſtly the manifold croſſes and ſufferings to which we are ſubject.

At preſent, we will come to a concluſion of our conſiderations on natural evil by endeavouring

deavouring to ſet three other propoſitions in an adequate light.

The firſt relates to thoſe evils which are neceſſary and unavoidable conſequences of the relations wherein we ſtand towards outward things, and they towards us.

Another, to thoſe which are the fruit of our own faulty behaviour.

The third and laſt relates particularly to death, which is ſo frequently repreſented as the greateſt of all evils.

I ſay firſt, then, that many things which we call evils, and which really are ſo, when in and of themſelves conſidered, are merely neceſſary and inevitable conſequences of the relations wherein externals are placed towards us, and we to them. Theſe relations are various. Relation between men and beaſts, who inhabit this earth in common

mon with us; relation between men and men, which together form but one ſociety; relation between the different abiding-places of men, and the greater or ſmaller prerogatives of their inhabitants; relation of the earth towards the ſun and the ſolar ſyſtem, and the ſolar ſyſtem towards the immenſe whole to which it belongs. As various and multiform as theſe relations are, ſo various and multiform muſt likewiſe the limitations of our condition be that ariſe from thence; and if theſe limitations be abſolute evils, then muſt we reckon that higheſt effect of divine goodneſs, the creation itſelf, as an evil.

The earth therefore is not ordained for us alone, but at the ſame time for an innumerable multitude of other creatures, ſince it is not adapted to our nouriſhment alone, but likewiſe to theirs, and as they have need of us, and we ſtill greater need of them. But ſhould indeed theſe creatures

have leſs title to the goodneſs of the Creator than we? Should he ſolely provide for us, and not for them? Or ſhould almighty goodneſs produce our race alone, and not likewiſe all that is capable of life and happineſs as well as we? If then at times we ſuffer damage on account of theſe creatures, if they expoſe us to ſome dangers, at times deſtroy our work, or deprive us of ſome of the fruit of our induſtry; is not this the natural effect of the relations that ſubſiſt between them and us? Are not they as well as we entitled to the enjoyment of the goods of this earth, the common foſter-mother of us all? and do not the advantages and conveniences they procure us very far out-weigh the injuries they do us?

Juſt as little, and ſtill leſs, can man, as man, exiſt alone. He muſt have aſſiſtances, muſt have other creatures of his kind about him, ſtand in connection with him, take

and

and have part in their fortunes, if he would not be ruined, but become rational and happy. But doſt thou act juſtly, doſt thou judge reaſonably, O man, when thou complaineſt of the diſagreeableneſs and diſguſt which at times enſue from theſe connections, as of evils thou oughteſt not to meet with? Certainly thou muſt ſerve others, if they ſerve thee; help them, if they help thee; bear their burden, if thou would'ſt have them to alleviate thine; be indulgent to their failings and infirmities, if thou requireſt them to overlook thy own. Certainly thou muſt yield at times to them, when their path croſſes thine, and their wants are more urgent, or their pretenſions more juſt, or their power is ſtronger than thine. But that which thou doeſt to-day for them, to-morrow they will do for thee; and if theſe reciprocal retaliations do not in every particular occurrence obtain, yet they certainly do in regard to the whole to which thou belongeſt. And ſhall this

mutual

mutual interchange of civilities, of ſervices, of indulgence, be an evil? Go, try the experiment; withdraw thyſelf from them, diſmiſs all fellowſhip with them, ſhut thyſelf up in ſolitude, be wholly independent, live entirely for thyſelf; and ſee whether thou wilt then be happier, whether thy life will not ſoon be a burden to thee.

We are, laſtly, parts of one whole, of one immenſely great aggregate. No part can of itſelf compoſe this whole: no part can at the ſame time fill more than one place in the diſpoſition of things: no part can be poſitively that which the other is. One while muſt one forego ſomething, and one while another; one while muſt one, and one while another, enjoy ſome advantage, if all ſhould go well with the whole. Thus cannot all men inhabit the ſame region of the earth. If thou liveſt in the temperate zone, then muſt another inhabit the

the torrid, and a third the frigid zone; if, moreover, all who can live at the ſame time, ſhould live (and to be and to live is doubtleſs infinitely better than not to be and not to live); if thy field be a garden of God, and enjoy the ſweet influences of heaven, then muſt the field of thy far diſtant brother, which cannot enjoy this advantage, even becauſe it is ſo much remoter, be a ſterile deſert, which he can only render fruitful by the utmoſt exertions of labour.

The globe itſelf is but a part of the whole ſolar-ſyſtem to which it belongs, and this ſolar-ſyſtem is no more than a part in the immenſe extent of God's domain. And even therefore can thy abode, the earth, be only that and nothing elſe than what it is; produce and nouriſh only theſe and no other plants, and fruits, and beaſts, and men; be only ſo and no otherwiſe inhabited, cultivated, employed; only yield matter and occaſion

occaſion to ſuch and no other affairs and pleaſures; adapt itſelf only to ſuch and no other, no finer and no groſſer, organs of ſenſe. Earth and water and air and fire, all is ſo, as to be adapted to us and the other inhabitants of the globe. And we are ſo, as creatures muſt be, for whom this fire, this air, this water, this earth, is ordained; and the globe itſelf, its ſolidity, its bulk, its diſtance from the fountain of light and heat, ſo as is fitting for the whole ſolar-ſyſtem; and this ſyſtem, ſo as is ſuited to the other innumerable hoſts of ſolar and mundane ſyſtems. All things are linked with each other together, all things ſtand in the moſt diverſified relations to each other, all together compoſe but one ſingle whole.

And thou, O man, wilt lament that thou doſt not alone compoſe this whole; that this whole does not barely ſubſiſt for thee; that thou art not at once this part and a thouſand

thouſand other parts of it beſide; that thou canſt not enjoy all, cannot do all, and effect all, that is effected, enjoyed, and done, in the whole immenſe creation! The creation then ſhould be a ſolitude, an uninhabited deſart, only that thou mighteſt not be circumſcribed! Would righteouſneſs or unrighteouſneſs, goodneſs or the want of goodneſs have place, if the Almighty gave only to thee, and not likewiſe to all which live without thee, and are or may be happy, life and with it the capacity of happineſs? And, having done this, having thereby placed thee in ſuch various relations as ſerve to the good of the whole and to thy own, ſhall it be imputed to him as an evil, ſhall it be held an injuſtice?

This, however, is not all. Conſider, O man, (this is my ſecond propoſition) conſider, that thou thyſelf art the author of the greateſt part and the moſt excruciating evils thou meeteſt with in the world, and

and that even the reſt would be eaſier and more tolerable to thee, if thy conduct were wiſer and better. Yes, thy follies and thy ſins are what deſpoil thee of ſo many real pleaſures, which nature offers thee; ſubject thee to ſo much pain and miſery, from which thou art warned by nature; and frequently render thy life ſo bitter and burdenſome, which, according to the arrangement of nature, might be ſo peaceful and happy. Oh, if thou didſt but hearken to the voice of God and nature; wouldſt but conſtantly conſider what thou art, and what the men, thy brethren, are; if thou didſt regard but them, thyſelf, and the other things that ſurround thee as what they are; if thou wert but to accuſtom thyſelf to ſurvey the whole of thy life, the whole of thy vocation: how many cares and troubles would be removed from thy heart! How many dangers, how many devious ways, wouldſt thou avoid! How often with a contented and a gladſome

mind

mind wouldſt thou purſue thy courſe, where now thou bedeweſt it with tears! Would ſo many artificial wants condemn thee to toilſome and anxious labour? Would reſtleſs ambition allow thee to be ſatisfied neither with thyſelf nor with others, or would the inſatiable thirſt of gold torment thee? Would degrading exceſſes ſo frequently deſtroy thy health, rack thee with pain, or ſhorten thy life? Would envy, hatred, and malice, rankle in thy ſoul like tormenting fiends, and turn thy heart into a neſt of ſcorpions? Would every oppoſition, every impediment, every unſucceſsful deſign, every defeated expectation, fill thy ſpirit with diſmay? Would vanity and pride, caprice and ſelf-intereſt, haughtineſs and ill-humour, ſo often embitter thy life, and make the ſociety of thy brethren a burden, which may and ſhould yield thee pleaſure and joy?—Accuſe not thy Maker, O man, accuſe only thyſelf, that to the few unavoidable evils

that

that are in the world, thou addeſt ſo many others, which thou couldſt ſo eaſily avoid if thou only wouldſt. Be wiſe, O man, be moderate; follow nature; think and act in conformity to thy vocation; require not to be that which thou canſt not be; and be that, but be ſo entirely and conſtantly, which thou oughteſt to be: and thy plague will inſtantly diminiſh, thy joys will increaſe and multiply from day to day, and no unmerited evil will caſt thee down, no one will remain without good and wholeſome effects.

In fine, and this is my third and laſt propoſition, even death itſelf is not that enormous evil for which it is ſo often taken. Of all natural evils, death indeed is that which is regarded and deſcribed as the greateſt and moſt dreadful. The object itſelf, and ſtill more the circumſtances and poſſible conſequences of it, are in reality terrible. To loſe all our goods and poſ-

ſeſſions for ever; to part with every comfort of life; to be torn from all our friends, to reſign our body to the grave and to corruption: and though not altogether, yet in the preſent mode, to ceaſe to be: this muſt certainly excite very unpleaſant repreſentations and feelings, muſt fill a man with trepidation and horror; is what he muſt hold to be an evil, muſt hold it to be the greateſt of all evils, if he had no compenſation to expect for this loſs, if he were not allowed to conſider this evil as a means to higher perfection. But even here our calm reflections furniſh us with various conſiderations which teach us more rightly to judge of the matter.

At once it is certain, that the human body, ſuch as it is, cannot continue for ever, that the principles of diſſolution lie ſcattered in its primitive conſtitution, in its natural frame; that its powers neceſſarily exhauſt by degrees, its limbs become leſs

pliant and at length immoveable, many ſmaller and larger veſſels cloſe, many tender parts grow hard, the impulſes and powers of the heart relax, and at length muſt ceaſe. To require the reverſe, implies to require another body; and to wiſh this, is to wiſh for another abode, other means of nouriſhment, another earth, another atmoſphere, another ſun, and other relations and connections with external things; and if all theſe were different, ſhould we ſtill be men, ſtill be the creatures that we are? And is this any thing but controverting with our Creator, and chuſing rather not to be at all, than to be as we are?

I am not ignorant, that ſin occaſions diſorders and deſtruction in the human body, that it renders the paſſage from the preſent into a ſuperior ſtate harder and more painful to man; that it has ſhortened the term of his life; and that death, in this reſpect,

reſpect, with all the terrifying circumſtances with which it is now attended, is the wages of ſin. But tranſitory and frail muſt ſtill the terreſtrial human body ever be, that draws its nouriſhment from this earth, and is adapted to this terreſtrial abode; and neither reaſon nor ſcripture will allow me to believe that man was ever ordained to remain conſtantly on this globe, or to make his tranſit into a ſuperior ſtate without putting off and changing this earthly tabernacle. This alteration of our ſtate, which we denominate death, is therefore, in one or the other way, in the nature of our body, or becauſe we are men, and becauſe not a higher claſs of being has taken our place in the empire of God.

Indeed this conſideration alone would not yet deprive death of its terrors. Indeed, if our whole exiſtence were to terminate with it, it would be always a dreadful, it would be the greateſt of evils.

But learn to take it only for what it actually is, O man; conſider it as the way to higher perfection; ſo wilt thou acknowledge it to be, not ſomething abſolutely ill; thou wilt confeſs it to be the means that puts thee in poſſeſſion of better goods. And this in fact it is; of this neither reaſon nor ſcripture will allow us to doubt. It is not the ceſſation, but the alteration of thy being; not the end, but the more perfect continuation of thy life; not the loſs of all that thou art and haſt, but only the loſs of externals, which, if thou haſt rightly employed them, have promoted thy inward, ſpiritual, permanent perfection, unfolded thy powers to a certain degree, and rendered thee capable of a nobler application of them, and which then in thy future ſtate will be of no farther ſervice to thee. Wouldſt thou be more perfect, wouldſt thou be happier, than here thou art and canſt become; then muſt thou neceſſarily undergo this change, be placed in other relations

with

with the ſpiritual and material world; thy ſphere of operation muſt be enlarged, thou muſt have higher affairs and loftier pleaſures, of which thou wert not capable here, and for which thy preſent condition, and the preſent concerns of thy body and thy connections with externals, muſt prepare thee. And ſhall this paſſage to perfection be an evil to thee?

Or is it merely the kind and manner of thy death, that thou holdeſt for ſo dreadful an evil? But if death itſelf be the paſſage to a higher, a better ſtate; then cannot the kind and manner of it be abſolutely bad.—Whether my powers be gradually exhauſted, or be conſumed on the couch of ſickneſs; or whether I die by an earthquake, in water, or in fire;—the way is different, but the end is the ſame: the way ſometimes more and at others leſs dreadful, the end is always good,—higher, permanent perfection. And the God, by

whom I am and live, knows how to preſerve that which is immortal in me, juſt as well in the depths of the earth, in the water and the fire, and to preſerve it unhurt, as by the apparently nearer and quieter means of the grave.

Or thinkeſt thou ſo ſenſually, ſo meanly, O man, that thou couldſt heartily content thyſelf with remaining eternally here, be ſatisfied with the point of force and weakneſs, with the proportion of ſorrows and joys, with the degree of knowledge and virtue, with the contracted circle of buſineſſes and pleaſures, thou haſt already ſo often run round, thou at preſent poſſeſſeſt? Oh then I lament thee as a creature that forgets both its deſcent and its vocation, that does violence to itſelf, and ſuppreſſes every generous reflection and feeling, that deprives itſelf of the prerogatives of manhood, the inceſſant endeavour after higher perfection, and prepares for itſelf ſorrows in-

inſtead of joys in the future ſtate into which he ſtill muſt paſs, and which might have been ſo deſireable, ſo delightful to him.

No; my ambition is greater, my aim more exalted, my deſires and endeavours extend themſelves farther. My preſent condition is indeed not burdenſome to me; I revere the wiſdom and goodneſs of my Creator in the inſtitution and arrangement of it: but I feel that I may be and become ſtill more than I at preſent am, and thereto will death prepare my way, by him ſhall I get at once a great ſtride nearer my mark; and ſhall I hold this means of becoming completer and happier, for ſomething abſolutely bad, for the greateſt of evils? No; even this is good, even this is gain, is benefit to me, that I muſt die, and even in death will I praiſe the goodneſs of my Creator and Father.

And now, O man, O chriſtian, thou who haſt heard the foregoing conſiderations with attention, haſt perceived and felt their truth, aſſociate them with each other in thy reflections; and if thou then feeleſt their perſuaſive energy, then leave off complaining of the multitude and greatneſs of the natural evils that are in the world. Venture no longer to accuſe the God who is love itſelf with the want of affection. No; no; from him, the ſupremely bountiful, nothing abſolutely ill can proceed; under his government muſt every thing that is bad, or appears to be ſo, be effective of good. He knows how to bring light out of darkneſs; brings it infallibly forth; and even that darkneſs would not be, if we were capable of the light without a previous dawn.

Think therefore conſtantly, that:

A being

A being without limitation would not be a man:

Tolerable, cautionary pain is preferable to unavoidable and total deſtruction:

A ſenſitive body, on which externals make far more agreeable than diſagreeable impreſſions, is much more deſirable than a body which indeed no diſagreeable impreſſions could affect, but muſt be utterly inſenſitive to all that are agreeable:

Whatever renders us intelligent, reaſonable men, unfolds and invigorates our powers, and enlarges our ſphere of action, is not evil, is means to perfection:

What makes us morally better, and exerciſes us in virtue, is wholeſome and good, is benefit to us, however unpleaſant and hurtful it may ſeem to us at firſt:

Part

Part cannot be the whole, man cannot be the ſole creature of God, the world cannot be the univerſe; relationſhips are limitations, and theſe are as diverſified and inevitable as thoſe;

The unwiſe, the fooliſh behaviour of man heaps far more and far greater evils upon him, than all nature in itſelf contains; and even theſe would not be half ſo heavy to him, if he were wiſer and better:

Death itſelf is not deſtructive evil; it is paſſage into another ſtate, proceſs to higher perfection.

Theſe leſſons of wiſdom forget not, O man; imprint them deeply on thy heart; ſo will the generality of evils ceaſe to be evils in thy ſight; ſo wilt thou find nothing, nothing abſolutely bad in the world of God, in his works and arrangements; ſo wilt thou feel in a lively manner the great ſu-

perabundance of good above evil, enjoy thy exiſtence and the goodneſs of thy Creator, be ſatisfied with thy preſent condition, be always making thyſelf fitter for thy future ſuperior vocation, and exclaim with inward conviction: God is excellent in power and in judgment, and in plenty of juſtice; he will not afflict. He has done all things well; his work is perfect. Give glory to God.

SECTION

SECTION IV.

WE have divided all evils that are in the world, or among mankind, into two claſſes, into natural or phyſical, and into moral. On the former, or natural evils, we have offered various conſiderations, which may convince us all, that theſe evils are not what they are commonly taken to be, and that they neither militate againſt the ſovereign goodneſs of God, nor againſt our real perfection and happineſs.—We will now diſcourſe of moral evils; and the greater the combination of theſe with the former, ſo muſt it already the more previouſly appear, that the caſe is the ſame with the one and the other, that the work and arrangements of God are irreproachable in regard

regard to both, and that all he does and allows is right and good.

At the ſame time I readily admit, that I have not purſued my reflections on theſe with the ſame aſſurance of finding ſufficient light and complete ſatisfaction, as I had in the former. I immediately ſaw difficulties before me, which I could ſo much the leſs hope to be able to ſolve, as the ſolution of them has already been ſo often attempted in vain. And theſe difficulties do actually ſubſiſt,—are probably not ſolvable always and by all men. But anxious uneaſineſs in theſe reflections I have not felt. My faith in the ſovereign goodneſs of God is not ſhaken by them; his eternally conſtant, his eternally effective love towards mankind, is no matter of doubt to me; their appointment and their fortunes, are not become a myſterious perplexity. The oftener I think on him, the all-bountiful, the more reaſon I find for leaving to him the diſpoſal

of my lot and that of all my brethren with the moſt comfortable aſſurance, and to expect conſtantly what is beſt both for them and for myſelf. And though the light that enlightens us in theſe concerns be only a feeble gleam, be no more than the dawn; ſtill it is light, and not darkneſs; and if, by its brightneſs, we cannot ſurvey all things, cannot find our way out of every labyrinth, yet we may diſtinguiſh many things by it, avoid many erroneous paths, and ſee enough to keep aloof from the abyſſes of doubt, and the pool of deſpondence.

Accordingly, we will take advantage of this light. If it do not lead us to all truth, yet it diſcovers to us the traces of many a truth. If it do not enable us to unravel every difficulty, ſtill it enables us to diminiſh their number, and allows us, ſooner or later, to hope for the diſentanglement of the reſt. In this view we will now

Unfold

Unfold a few remarks, which may contribute ſomewhat to the forming a right judgment of the moral evil that is in the world.

By moral evil we mean the diſarrangement which error and vice have occaſioned in man, his bad propenſities and paſſions, his unrighteous, lawleſs behaviour, and the noxious, ruinous conſequences which all theſe bring upon himſelf and upon others. This evil is undoubtedly manifold and great. Error and vice have the aſcendant among mankind, exerciſe over many of them an unlimited ſway, and none of all can aver, that he has not ſinned. What ſins, what crimes, what enormities, have not been perpetrated by mankind! By what low luſts, by what corrupt paſſions, do they not allow themſelves to be ſhackled! And what ruin, what devaſtation, are not occaſioned by theſe ſins, theſe crimes, theſe luſts and paſſions, in domeſtic

tic and civil ſociety! What ſcourges do they not often bring on whole countries and ſtates! How can this evil, the reality of which no man can deny, under which every one more or leſs ſuffers, conſiſt with the ſovereign goodneſs of God, the Creator of men? Might he not have prevented it, might he not have totally baniſhed ſin, this greateſt of all evils, from his empire, and thereby have rendered it impoſſible for all the miſeries that flow from it to ariſe? To the anſwering of theſe queſtions, ſeveral important obſervations occur.

The firſt is this: God has permitted this evil; therefore, taken in the whole, far more good muſt ariſe from it than harm; for God is, and cannot be otherwiſe than ſupremely wiſe and ſupremely good. This ſingle propoſition is ſufficiently ſatisfactory to me; and the argument of it is as certain to me as the certainty

tainty of the exiſtence of God. For, to believe a God, and not to aſcribe to him the higheſt wiſdom and the higheſt goodneſs, is an open contradiction. A Being, that is omniſcient and almighty,—and that the Creator of the world muſt neceſſarily be,—a being that is omniſcient and almighty, cannot act otherwiſe than wiſely and righteouſly, or, which is exactly the ſame thing, beneficently. Defect of underſtanding and judgment, ſuppoſe ignorance; and defect of kindneſs, implies error, and the ſentiment of weakneſs. Neither of them can poſſibly be thought of concerning the Supreme Exiſtence, concerning God. Him can no error miſlead, to him no deſigns occur which cannot be accompliſhed, or not ſo accompliſhed as he had determined. Him can no error miſlead; to him nothing can preſent itſelf but as it actually is; no error, and no ſentiment of weakneſs can ſeduce him to oppreſs others, to be at variance with them, to revenge himſelf on

them, to make them the miniſters of his vengeance, or to abandon them to their weakneſs and folly, to their own diſpoſal, not to give them the good of which they are ſuſceptible, to deprive them of it without cauſe, or in any reſpect to ordain and to do what is not right and good. In ſhort, the moſt perfect intellect and the moſt perfect might cannot be thought of without the moſt perfect wiſdom and the moſt perfect goodneſs. But, if God be perfectly wiſe and perfectly good, and has permitted the ſin, the moral evil that is in the world, has not prevented it by his might: then muſt he neceſſarily have foreſeen, in the whole range of times and worlds, infinitely more good than ill, infinitely more happineſs than miſery, proceeding from it; that this real or apparent imperfection, tends to the greateſt perfection of the whole;—that, from this diſſonance in the creation, the completeſt harmony would at length ariſe, and then his ſovereign goodneſs would be

confeſſed,

confeſſed, and felt, and praiſed by all that is and lives. And ſhall not this be enough for my tranquillity, though I cannot as it were diſcover the intimate cauſe of it, and ſcan the immenſe combination of this whole? No; no; from him, the ſupremely wiſe, the ſupremely good, I have nothing unrighteous, nothing unreaſonable, nothing ſevere, nothing cruel, to dread. His ways may be ever dark, ever intricate to me; truth and goodneſs muſt mark them all.

We need not however be abſolutely ſatisfied with theſe general conſiderations. We may advance yet a few ſteps farther. We can at leaſt diſcover ſomething of the grounds and views of God in the permiſſion of ill, and of the good that ariſes from it; and even this will clear the way for us to a more adequate judgment of it.

I proceed therefore to a ſecond remark, which is this: As the greateſt part of phy-

ſical evils have their foundation in the limitation of the human capacities and powers; ſo likewiſe is moral evil, for the greateſt part, a natural conſequence of this limitation which cauſes man to be what he is.—Even that which renders us capable of ſo great, and an ever increaſing virtue and perfection, is that which alſo renders us capable of error, of vice, of immorality.—The beaſts can make no fooliſh, but likewiſe no prudent election; they cannot ſin, but neither are they capable of moral action; can do no ill, but likewiſe no good; cannot be vicious, but are in like manner incapable of virtue; they cannot degrade themſelves, but alſo not ſoar aloft to ſublimer objects.—Man can do both; and is not this a great prerogative he poſſeſſes above the irrational animals? Error implies underſtanding as well as the knowledge of truth; fooliſh as well as wiſe election, ſuppoſes conſideration and freedom; morally bad actions, as well as morally good,

imply

imply phyſical power and the free application of it; the loweſt ſenſual luſt, as well as the nobleſt pureſt love, implies endeavour after extending our ſphere of operation, after higher perfection. Where the one ſubſiſts, the knowledge of truth, the prudent choice, the morally good action, the generous and pure love, in ſuch limited creatures as we are; there likewiſe may the other, error, the fooliſh choice, the morally bad action, the low ſenſual luſt, have place. He that goes and runs, and yet has but a determinate portion of ſtrength, and meets with impediments in his courſe, muſt likewiſe ſtumble, and may even fall; and he who will be ſecure from ſtumbling and falling, muſt not attempt to go or to run. He that will ſee, and yet has and can have only limited optics, muſt be liable to ſee improperly, obſcurely, and partially; and he that will abſolutely not be liable to this, muſt ſhut his eyes, and abjure all ſight.

Even ſo is it with man and his moral powers, with his capacity to act morally or immorally. — —Is he to reflect, with his limited mental faculty, upon truth and error, upon appearance and reality, and diſcriminate them from each other; then muſt he be liable to take one for the other, to receive error as wiſdom, and appearance as reality.— —Is he to chuſe between good and bad, between better and beſt; then muſt he compare both objects together, and both with his preſent and future ſtate: and, ſince he cannot inſpect them all at once, nor all in the ſame lucid appearance; then muſt it be poſſible for him to err in this choice, to prefer the bad to the good, the better to the beſt, that his compariſon of both ſhould be imperfect and fallible.— — Is he to be capable of love, without which no happineſs can be for him; then, with his limited power of mental repreſentation, and with the ſtrong impreſſions which externals make upon him, muſt it be

poſſible that this love ſhould not conſtantly be directed to the worthieſt, that it ſhould ſometimes light on unworthy, little, and low objects; and ſince his ſenſibility, his capacity to love, is, at the ſame time, nothing leſs than uncircumſcribed; then muſt it likewiſe be poſſible, that one inordinate paſſion ſhould take up his whole heart, that it ſhould hinder him from loving other far better and more amiable objects, that he ſhould be indifferent towards them, deſpiſe them, ſhun, and even abhor them.—In ſhort, is man to be free; that is, be able to act from the intuitions and repreſentations of his intellect; and may his perceptions and repreſentations, by means of their limitation, be erroneous and falſe: then muſt it alſo be poſſible for him, to follow theſe erroneous and falſe repreſentations, and therefore to act unjuſtly, unreaſonably, wickedly, and cruelly.

The foundation of the poſſibility of ill, is the foundation of the poſſibility of good; and he that would deprive man of the former, muſt diveſt him alſo of the latter, or he wiſhes that man might not be man, he wiſhes contradictory things.—The queſtion, Wherefore has God permitted moral ill, or ſin? is therefore at bottom the ſame as the queſtion, Wherefore has God produced man, and not another creature in his place? or, Wherefore do we exiſt, ſince we cannot at the ſame time not exiſt? And ſo long as exiſtence is infinitely more advantageous than non-exiſtence, no reflecting man will ever complain of having been called into being; and ſo long as this renders us capable of a certain degree of happineſs, he will never charge the Creator with want of goodneſs for not making us capable of the higher degree of happineſs whereof beings of a ſuperior kind are capable.

Third

Third obſervation: As little as phyſical evils are abſolute evils, or without all good conſequences and effects, even ſo little alſo are moral. Theſe equally occaſion and promote an infinitude of real perfection and happineſs; and the preponderancy of the good over the bad is here as certain and as great as there.

Where is the man, the profligate, who has abſolutely nothing good, nothing eſtimable, nothing ſerviceable in him; who is abſolutely deſtitute of all capacity for being wiſe and good; in whoſe mind not one good, one ſolid reflection, in whoſe heart not one kind, one humane ſentiment will ariſe; who never applies his mechanical and ſpiritual talents to any uſeful matter or buſineſs; who has never afforded any ſervice to ſociety, either mediately or immediately, either with or againſt his conſent; and therefore muſt be conſidered abſolutely

abſolutely as a perfectly uſeleſs, an utterly noxious excreſcence of creation?

What powers, what activity, on the other hand, are not often diſplayed in the tranſgreſſions and crimes of man! And what capacities, what powers, do they not call forth and excite about him! This all inordinate, all malignant paſſions do; and the farther they extend in operation, the greater and more violent the horrors they ſpread around them, ſo much more power and activity do they excite in a thouſand and a thouſand human ſouls; and if, on one ſide, death and deſtruction rage, ſo on the other new life and new activity ariſe. Take the vindictive, the ambitious, the unjuſt warrior, the conqueror, nay the tyrant himſelf, for example. What ſprings of the human heart will they not ſet in motion? What new, what comprehenſive ſyſtems of reflection, what great plans and proſpects that expand the ſoul, what various combinations

nations of means and ends, what exertion of mental and mechanical powers, what exerciſes of thought, of circumſpection, of courage, of fortitude, of ſelf-command, of moderation, of ſecreſy, what colliſion of actions and counter-actions, will not be produced in the whole larger or ſmaller ſphere wherein theſe paſſions prevail? And ſhall this, in regard to the conſequences, be ſomething abſolutely ill? The criminal, the profligate, who deſires nothing leſs than to promote perfection, who deſires no more than to advance corruption, and the gratification of his own ſelfiſh paſſions, acts indeed wickedly; he debaſes, diſgraces himſelf, and prepares for himſelf the moſt painful ſufferings, the moſt righteous puniſhments. But developement, exhibition, exertion of human power, is good, is progreſs to perfection; and this natural good is ever, more or leſs, a conſequence of moral ill. Phyſical perfection is here the ground-plot, the means to moral perfection: what

what therefore advances one, advances alſo the other.

Nay, moral evil muſt of neceſſity immediately tend to the promotion of virtue. Among men, who by reaſon of their limited nature, cannot otherwiſe become good and be confirmed in goodneſs than by practice, the mixture and the conflict of good and ill, the ſtruggles between virtue and vice, taken in the whole, muſt be eminently advantageous to virtue. The more continued and powerful the oppoſition, ſo much more honourable the manly fortitude that overcomes it: the more violent the provocations of the vindictive, ſo much more noble the meekneſs that is not irritated at them: the greater the injuries, ſo much more divine the forgiveneſs and pardon; the heavier the outward ſhackles, the more exalted the unconquerable freedom of the mind: the more vexatious the ingratitude, ſo much the purer the unwearied benefi-

cence;

cence: the more conſiderable the loſs for the ſake of truth and juſtice, ſo much more real the love to both: the ſtronger and more engaging the temptations to ſin, ſo much more glorious the conqueſt. By oppoſition, by danger, by impediments and difficulties, by ſufferings and loſſes, by enemies and perſecutors, is human virtue exerciſed, ſtrengthened, purified, and brought by degrees to that firmneſs which ſurmounts all weakneſs and alteration. And to this muſt even the moral evil that is in the world contribute in an uncommon degree, in and of itſelf as pernicious and criminal as it may be.

And how often is it not ſalutary in this reſpect even to the wicked, to the vicious, who ſtill reform? How often is not the perſonal experience of good and ill, and their different conſequences, the beſt, nay the only means, of bringing ſenſual, thoughtleſs men to reflection, of making them

them cautious and wiſe, of rendering ſin deteſtable to them, and of guarding them againſt all farther retrogreſſion to it? Is there a ſmall ſelect number of men who have heartily fixed their love on virtue, before they were even acquainted with vice, who remain free from voluntary ſins, and have taken warning merely from the example of others; yet there are far greater numbers who have firſt eaten of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and then felt the noxious, the painful conſequences of the enjoyed fruit, are aſhamed of their error, perceive the deceitfulneſs of ſin, learn to abhor it, and hold up their former lamentable experience as an impenetrable ſhield againſt it; and likewiſe for theſe is even moral evil by no means abſolute evil; it has admoniſhed them, confirmed them in goodneſs, is become their remedy to a permanent amendment.

Add

Add to this—and for this ſolution we ſtand indebted to Chriſtianity alone, which affords us even here the cleareſt light, and without which we could never have advanced ſo far in our reflections on God and man.—Think therefore, fourthly, on the wiſe, the gracious diſpoſitions, which God has made by his ſon Jeſus, for the reſtoration of man, and for removing the detriment occaſioned by ſin. Great the evil: as great the aſſiſtance. Here ſin; there deliverance from ſin. Here univerſal mortality; there univerſal immortality. Here a Man by whom ſin and death came upon all; there a man by whom righteouſneſs and life came upon all. As in Adam all die, ſo all in Chriſt are made alive: That as ſin hath reigned unto death, even ſo might grace reign through righteouſneſs unto eternal life, by Jeſus Chriſt our Lord. He, this great deliverer and ſaviour, ſhall put all our enemies, all the enemies of human happineſs, ſin, death, the grave, under his feet, totally exterminate them, and then deliver

up

up his kingdom, as a kingdom where pure truth, exerciſed, and confirmed virtue, immoveable happineſs prevail, to God, his Father, and ours, who is all in all, and will eternally be.—Indeed, an evil which could not be entirely remedied, which would conſtantly remain evil in all, its conſequences and effects, that would ſupreme, almighty goodneſs never have permitted; never would diſſonance have ariſen in the creation of the Omniſcient, were it conſtantly to remain diſſonance, and never diſſolve into harmony. But evil, to the removal and extirpation whereof, even before it actually was, the moſt powerful means were prepared; evil, which might and would become harmleſs and at length wholeſome, to permit this is the work of Omniſcient Goodneſs, which comprehends all things, and ſurveys all things at one view.

And then, lift up your thoughts into the future world, of which, thanks to

Chriſtianity, we have the moſt infallible aſſurance, and ſo many juſter conceptions than the philoſophers of antiquity had; elevate yourſelves, I ſay, into the future world, which alone can completely ſolve the knotty points that now employ our thoughts, and which will certainly hereafter unravel all, and ſhew us all things right and good. The preſent ſtate of man is not his whole appointment, is only the commencement of his life, and the infinite proceſs of the developement of his powers. Eternity can compenſate, ſupply, beautify, and regulate all. No power, no capacity, can be totally loſt in the world of God; nothing good, though no more than phyſical good, will be unſerviceable for ever, or not draw after it conſequences as good.—Indeed puniſhments, juſt, ſevere puniſhments, await the voluntary ſinner; and woe to him, whom the idea of theſe puniſhments does not terrify from ſin! He will ſuffer what is

due to his deeds, ſuffer more, ſuffer more horribly, than he can at preſent conceive in the gloomieſt hours of his life. But even theſe ſufferings, theſe puniſhments, are ordained by the Supremely Good, who inflicts ſuffering on no one, for the ſake of making him ſuffer, but for effectuating good thereby. Sooner or later will God manifeſt himſelf to his whole creation as Love itſelf.

Eternity,—a thought, which is to us more word than thought,—eternity comprehends all things; but we cannot comprehend it with our underſtandings. It unravels all things; but how, that cannot we, mortals, perceive. It leads and brings all to the goal; but when and whereby, is concealed from us. From eternity to eternity, from one great revolution of theſe or any other ſolar and mundane ſyſtems to another, what revolutions may not the living

and ſenſible beings that belong to it undergo! What means for bringing light out of darkneſs, for effecting good, infinite good, through ill, does it not contain! What ſolutions does it not allow to be expected by thinking minds!—And that which is now diſorder, or appears to be; ſhall that be eternal, or appear to be? Shall it not diſſolve into the moſt beautiful, the moſt perfect order? And though that, though it even be, according to our mode of meaſuring time, never ſo late, after the lapſe of never ſo many eternities and epochas; what will this moment of darkneſs and apparent diſorder be to the light and harmony, this inſtant of ſuffering to the joy and bliſs, that will then continue from eternity to eternity, as eternal as God?

After all this, do any difficulties ſtill remain, which we have not completely ſolved, any matters which we cannot compare and combine; yet certainly this need

not lead us into miſtake. We plainly perceive how all phyſical or natural evil is effect and diſpoſition of divine wiſdom and goodneſs; we clearly ſee, how, in many reſpects, it is and may be permiſſion of moral: and if now this evil ſtill preſents a dark ſide to our view, is it not reaſonable that we ſhould ſeek the cauſe of this obſcurity rather in our own eyes, than in the matter itſelf? Shall we, we who muſt confeſs all the works of the Lord, which we competently underſtand, to be perfect and incapable of improvement, ſhall we not truſt, that likewiſe all the reſt, which we cannot fully ſcan, are as complete and perfect?

Confeſs then, confeſs and revere the ſovereign wiſdom and goodneſs of God, even in the permiſſion of moral ill. Doubt not of it, that, ſooner or later, out of it will ariſe the greateſt poſſible good; that at length, from the tumult of inordinate human

man paſſions, from the manifold hard conflicts between truth and error, virtue and vice, from the apparently ſingular effects and events of both, ſo much light, order, beauty, bliſs, will ariſe, as, without the preſent diſpoſition of things, could never have obtained. This may and muſt be as certain to you, as certain as you believe a God, a firſt, an eternal cauſe of all things.

Beware only of ſin. Sin is undoubtedly the greateſt of all evils, the only real evil, the ſole that can render you actually unhappy, and hurt you for ever. Have you overcome this diſturber of human ſatisfaction and joy, this foe to your happineſs; are you, through Jeſus, become free from its dominion? Oh, then nothing will or can harm you; then nothing will or can be dreadful to you, nothing make you dejected or afraid. Ill and good, ſorrows and joys, the preſent and the future, heaven and earth, God and the world, all is

yours; all ſerve and work to your advantage, and to the furtherance of your happineſs; all eternally declare this truth, that God is love.

JUSTIFICATION

OF

DIVINE PROVIDENCE,

IN REGARD TO THE

TERRESTRIAL WELFARE

OF THE

IMPIOUS AND THE PIOUS.

Fret not thyſelf becauſe of evil men; neither be thou envious at the wicked. For there ſhall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked ſhall be put out.

Prov. xxiv. 19, 20.

JUSTIFICATION OF DIVINE PROVIDENCE, IN REGARD TO THE TERRESTRIAL WELFARE OF THE IMPIOUS AND THE PIOUS.

PART I.

THE more incomprehenſible the greatneſs and perfection of God; ſo much the more irrational and audacious is the pride that ſo far dazzles men as to induce them to blame the ways of the Lord, and to imagine they diſcover great faults in his wiſe adminiſtration. Does not all nature proclaim to us, does not every

creature, the worm as well as the angel, the grain of ſand as well as the ſun, with an audible voice: The greatneſs of our Creator is inexpreſſible, and his underſtanding has no bounds. He embraces all; he ſees through all at once; what may be, what has been, what is, and what in all future ages will be. His thoughts are farther exalted above the thoughts of man, than the luminous conception of the chief of the angels exceeds the dark ideas of the loweſt reptile. And what ſays the arrangement we perceive in the whole creation? What ſays the univerſal and invariable law, by which all nature moves and acts? Do not all invite us to this concluſion: The rules of the government of the Moſt High, the impelling motives of his actions, are altogether great; they reach into infinitude. The Omniſcient acts not, like the ſhort-ſighted mortal, who ſees nothing but what is juſt before his eyes. He ſurveys the whole, he produces the faireſt harmony among

among all the parts of it, be the diſtance never ſo remote in time or ſpace: and his views are to us, who know but ſo ſmall a part of theſe immenſe dependencies, very frequently inſcrutable. We ſhould admire his ways and his works, adore his holy will, and contentedly rely upon his providence; but not preſume to cenſure what we do not underſtand. The little we know of the kingdom and government of God, is ſufficient to quiet our minds, and to make us happy; it is ſufficient to furniſh us with the loftieſt ideas of what is concealed from our inſpection.—Would man but purſue then at all times the equitable dictates of reaſon and religion; he would not ſo frequently ſin againſt God by unrighteous complaints, he would not manifeſt ſo much perverſeneſs and imbecillity in his judgements on the ways of God. He would humbly acknowledge his ignorance, and not be aſhamed of his bounded conceptions. But what does the blind mortal? He forgets that he is a

feeble

feeble and extremely confined creature, and thinks to ſound all things with the line of his intellect. He dares to find fault with the works and the ways of the Moſt High, and diſcovers defects and imperfections in things that are far beyond his orbit of ſight. He compares the all-piercing intellect of God with his childiſh and viſionary ideas. He knows neither the world nor himſelf, and preſcribes laws of behaviour to the Lord of the world. One while it is the conſtitution of nature that diſpleaſes him, and which he, the ignorant fool, would have conſtituted better. At another time there are certain occurrences that happen to men, which he cannot explain, and therefore he holds them for contradictory and unjuſt. He knows vicious and impious perſons, who find themſelves in flouriſhing circumſtances, whoſe plans ſucceed, who are in poſſeſſion of power and authority, and ſeem to know no want of any thing. He perceives, on the other hand,

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the friends of virtue, who live in meanneſs and poverty, who ſigh under the load of various tribulations, who are deſpiſed and ill-treated by all men. Theſe occurrences do not ſeem to accord with what he calls wiſdom and juſtice; they contradict the repreſentation he has formed of the government of the world. He therefore charges the Lord with injuſtice, and murmurs againſt his providence. He frames derogatory notions of true virtue and piety. He denies their excellency and their utility, draws the truth of the divine promiſes into doubt, and takes up the language of the ſinners of old: What is the Almighty, that we ſhould ſerve him? And what profit ſhould we have if we pray unto him? The more indecent, however, the more pernicious and criminal theſe thoughts may be; the more frequently even the ſincere worſhipers of God are tormented and perplexed with ſimilar doubts; ſo much the more neceſſary is it to confute them with

with all diligence. I have therefore reſolved to employ the preſent hour, under the favour of the Moſt High, in ſolving theſe difficulties, as far as the weakneſs of our perſpicacity allows, and to juſtify the ways of God.

I will endeavour to do away the reproach caſt on the divine government, from the unequal diſtribution of outward proſperity, and from the terreſtrial welfare of the impious. You will ſee, that the greateſt part of the ſeeming force of this reproach reſts on the erroneous judgements we paſs on the characters and fortunes of men. You will ſee with how much juſtice it is that Solomon admoniſhes the diſciple of wiſdom, in the maxim before us: Fret not thyſelf becauſe of evil men, neither be thou envious at the wicked. For there ſhall be no reward to the evil man; the candle, or the happineſs, of the wicked ſhall be put out. The following conſide-

rations and remarks will, as I hope, ſufficiently inſtruct and convince you of it.

The firſt is this: We deceive ourſelves very frequently in the judgements we form of the moral condition, that is, of the good or bad frame of the heart and the courſe of our neighbour. We hold many men for vicious, who yet are not ſo, and on the other hand aſcribe to others a high degree of virtue and piety, who are nothing leſs than virtuous. It is no eaſy matter to form right ideas of the predominant features in the character of a man. You deceive yourſelves, when you conclude from ſome particular actions, of his temper and all the reſt of his conduct; or if you conſider his outward deportment, his words and looks, as ſigns that are always in correſpondence with his real diſpoſitions. We ſee no more than what paſſes before our eyes, what falls under our ſenſes; the ſecret ſprings and propenſities of the human

man heart are not to be known but by continued attention: in many caſes they can only be diſcovered on certain particular occaſions, which but ſeldom preſent themſelves, and are immediately over. What is more uſual with us than to let ourſelves be duped by appearances, and to take diſſimulation for truth and integrity? How often does vice put on the countenance of virtue, and oblige us, under this impoſing maſk, to ſhew her the reſpect and honour which are only due to virtue! How ingenious are the paſſions, in diſguiſing themſelves, and in concealing from us their malignant views, that they may compaſs them with greater ſucceſs! The moſt brilliant actions are, not unfrequently, mere artful coverings to deceit and wickedneſs, for palliating the moſt ſhameful diſorders, and blinding the eyes of the vulgar. A zealous advocate for the rights of God and man has perhaps nothing in view, with all his ſeemingly generous pains, but to

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ſatiate his ferocity, his rapacity, or his pride. The heart of that other, the affable, the courteous, the captivating man, is full of bitterneſs and envy, and his far-famed liberality is only founded on the vain deſire of diſplaying his advantages before others, and of obtaining their paltry praiſe. In ſhort, could we compare the thoughts and diſpoſitions of men with their words and works; could we rightly ſtate the true grounds and aims of their demeanour at all times; we ſhould very often acknowledge, that, That which is highly eſteemed among men is abomination with God. On the other hand, the integrity and piety of many a ſincere chriſtian remain at times too long unknown. His virtue makes no ſhow, as he practiſes it in the narrow circle of his family, his friends, and acquaintance, and ſeeks no applauſe from men, but is ſatisfied with the good teſtimony of his conſcience, which ſo far exceeds all the approbation and praiſe of

the world. He many times deſignedly conceals his nobleſt actions, and confers on his fellow-citizens the greateſt benefits, without their knowledge. He ſerves God in ſecret, and avoids even the ſmalleſt appearance of hypocriſy. Allow that, with all this, he may have ſome faults, which are very conſpicuous, which he knows himſelf, abhors, and combats, without being able to gain a complete victory over them. Envy ſets herſelf to work to magnify theſe faults; report ſpreads them abroad; we ourſelves have been witneſſes of them. His eſtimable qualities, his really great merits, are unknown to us; and, from theſe particular failings, which he abominates himſelf, we draw a haſty concluſion of his whole character. So eaſily may we deceive ourſelves, unleſs we uſe all poſſible precaution, in judging of the diſpoſition and conduct of a man. Leave therefore the definitive ſentence on the value and merits of mortals to him alone who trieth

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the heart and the reins. Complain not of the proſperity of any whom you adjudge to be impious: you probably place numbers in this claſs, who are of the friends of religion and virtue. Murmur not at the misfortune that they meet with, whom you number among the juſt: it is likely there may be many of theſe who by no means deſerve that name, and bear no more than the due reward of their ſins.

The ſecond remark is this: Many appear to be proſperous, ſo long as we behold their circumſtances only from afar, and with a tranſient view: but their proſperity vaniſhes away as ſoon as we examine it nearer; it loſes, at leaſt, the greateſt part of its value by the manifold evils and hardſhips that are implicated with it. Be cautious then how you truſt to your ſenſes, in rightly balancing and ſtating the proſperity of a man. Their ſentence is very deceitful; they are eaſily dazzled by every

appearance.—You envy the proſperity of ſome vicious rich man. He lives in the greateſt abundance; he yearly increaſes his income, and poſſeſſes far more than he can ever expect to uſe. Every man flatters him, and his opulence procures him influence and reſpect. It at the ſame time covers all his faults; it protects him from the public ſcorn, which otherwiſe he would have to expect. But how far from enviable is all this in the ſight of the wiſe, who conſider it impartially! Would you eſtimate his proſperity; then count not only the gold he poſſeſſes; take into the reckoning the painful labour, the diſtreſſing uneaſineſſes, the anxious cares, the acquiſition and ſecurity of his wealth occaſion; count the ſleepleſs nights his avarice makes him paſs, and the excruciating thoughts that ariſe from the fear of loſing his wealth; laſtly, conſider, that no treaſure is ſufficient to ſatisfy his ſoul, or to comfort him under the terrors of death: then would you deem

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the rich, whoſe heart is attached to the earth, to be a wretched ſlave, and his proſperity a grievous burden.—But you probably admire the ſplendour that ſurrounds the man of iniquity, and the authority that inveſts him. He poſſeſſes the ſmiles of the great-ones of the world; he is a favourite of princes; every one ſues for his kindneſs, and on his looks depend the hopes and fears, the joys and ſorrows, of the numerous train of his worſhipers. But does he therefore deſerve the name of a happy man? What labour and toil has it not coſt him, before he aroſe to this eminent ſtation! How difficult is it for him to keep himſelf on this ſlippery pinnacle, and to avoid the ſnares which envy and animoſity are continually laying before his ſteps! What is more unſtable and vain than his imaginary or real grandeur? A careleſs word, a trifling ſlip, a mere accident, may deprive him of all this reſpect, and plunge him into the deepeſt diſgrace.

His magnificence vaniſhes away far quicker than it aroſe; and he, who to-day is admired or envied of all, is to-morrow the object of the cruelleſt ſcorn.—Laſtly, let the voluptuary make his appearance, and weigh his proſperity. He deſpiſes low covetouſneſs, and is free from the fetters that bind the proud. He does what delights his heart, and is agreeable in his eyes. His ſenſes are his guides; pleaſure and joy are the aim of his wiſhes; and his whole life is a round of interchanging enjoyments. But how empty is even his felicity, and how cloſe does pain tread on his pleaſures, nay, how inſeparably is it connected with them! Contemplate him in the moment that he awakes from his ſenſual ſtupefaction, when he is left to himſelf, when all is huſh and ſtill about him, when no wild uproar, no jovial riot, diſtracts his mind, and deſtroys reflection. How uneaſy he is! How burdenſome to himſelf! What a martyrdom to him is ſolitude! How oppreſſive the re-

reflections that fix his attention, againſt his will, on his condition, on his conduct, and on the conſequences of it! His heart is empty, and he knows of nothing that can employ it agreeably. The recollection of his exceſſes ſtings him with remorſe; and he muſt allow, that he is moſt unhappy. His ſenſes at length become obtuſe; the ſources of his felicity fail him. And yet he knows of no other pleaſures than ſuch as flatter the ſenſes. His taſte is entirely ſpoilt; and he is incapable of reliſhing the pure, the raviſhing ſatisfactions which truth and the practice of virtue procure to the pious.—So deceitful is outward proſperity. So little cauſe have you to envy the vicious, when the Lord allows them wealth, and honour, and pleaſant days. They appear to be happy, but are in fact moſt wretched. Connect theſe conſiderations with the following, and you will have a ſtill ſtronger argument for tranquillity of mind.

They are theſe: Many ſeem to be unhappy, and yet are not ſo. Oft have you already taken offence at the lot of the upright, the virtuous man. His whole courſe of life is a pattern of the pureſt virtue and piety. He is a ſincere and zealous worſhiper of God, a rational and undiſguiſed chriſtian. He is a model of temperance, of induſtry, of juſtice; all unlawful means of becoming rich and great, all arts of craftineſs and fraud, are abomination to him; an incorruptible integrity dwells in his heart, and characteriſes all his actions. He is a general philanthropiſt, and dedicates his faculties to the good of his country and that of his fellow-citizens, with the greateſt pleaſure. Notwithſtanding all this, he may ſit in the duſt; his ſervices may be unrequited and forgotten; he, the wiſe, the righteous, may be under the authority of the fool, the tyrant; and his virtue may be deſpiſed, while the wickedneſs of the potent is crowned with honour. He brings him-

himſelf and his family into trouble by it, and has not much more than a bare ſufficiency for the ſuſtenance of life. You lament him; you compaſſionate his ſeemingly bad circumſtances; you wiſh him better, and his virtue a worthier lot: but you deceive yourſelves; appearances have blinded you. He is happier than the vicious prince on his throne. He is free from the bondage of the paſſions, and is maſter of himſelf. His innocence covers him, he wraps himſelf up in his virtue, and his dwelling is the dwelling of peace. He knows that God is his Father and his Friend, who will never forſake him, and never withdraw his favour from him. His days flow on without any anxious cares; his happineſs is not dependent on any events. The good teſtimony of his conſcience attends him wherever he goes; it alleviates the moſt pungent afflictions. He can lift up his eyes to heaven in confidence and joy, and rely on the mercy and help

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of the God who dwells therein. His ſoul is ſerene, and enjoys the peace of God which ſurpaſſes all conception. He finds, in the conſciouſneſs of his integrity, in the approbation and grace of the Eternal, and in the expectation of the future life, far more ſources of joy than that imaginary darling of fortune can meet with in all his diſſipations. Content gives a reliſh to his food, and makes his labours eaſy and pleaſant. He falls into the arms of ſleep with an unruffled ſpirit, and taſtes the ſweets of it undiſturbed and entire. He can think without terror on death and the grave. He has the lovelieſt proſpects before him, and the approach of his end is welcome to him; it announces to him the enjoyment of ineffable and unterminable bliſs. And ſhall you hold this friend of God and virtue for unhappy; him, whoſe happineſs depends on no outward things, and is as unchangeable as truth? Much rather confeſs, that life does not conſiſt in abundant poſſeſſions,

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nor real happineſs in earthly advantages. Alter your language, and affirm, that godlineſs with content is great, nay the greateſt gain.

My fourth remark is this: The wiſe providence of God knows far better than we do our diſpoſitions and powers, and knows far better than we for what ſtation we are adapted, and how much of its bleſſings it may entruſt us with. Each man has a certain ſphere, in which he may be uſeful, and may promote his own as well as the general benefit, with good ſucceſs. Does he go beyond the ſphere allotted to him; has he got into a ſtation that is above his capacities and powers; then is he detrimental to himſelf and others, and his happineſs and utility diminiſh, inſtead of being augmented by it.—You admire ſome virtuous man, who lives in moderate circumſtances, and wiſh him a much higher degree of reſpect and authority than he actually

tually poſſeſſes. He is diſcreet, obliging, bountiful. He knows how to employ his worldly circumſtances to the nobleſt uſes, and makes beneficence his greateſt pleaſure. Such people, you ſay to yourſelves, ſhould poſſeſs the greateſt opulence; they ſhould be the general ſtewards of the goods of the earth; they ſhould be the lords of the world. So would innocence be protected, virtue rewarded, vice diſgraced and puniſhed; ſo would order, righteouſneſs, and peace, be eſtabliſhed and confirmed for ever. But the Sovereign Ruler of the world knows the capacities of his ſubjects and worſhipers better than you. He knows the poſſible as well as the actual, and takes account of both in the diſtribution of his goods. That virtuous man you mention, who at preſent enjoys a moderate fortune, may conquer the temptations he meets with to ſin. They are not ſtrong enough to weaken his generous ſpirit, or to make him ſlacken in his purpoſe of ſerving both

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God and man with inviolable attachment. But increaſe his conſequence; augment his treaſures; elevate him to a higher pitch of authority and power. His virtue begins to waver; it is too feeble for this dangerous poſition. The unuſual ſplendor that ſurrounds him dazzles his ſight; ſtronger temptations lead him aſtray; he cannot bear his proſperity. His amiable meekneſs gives place to pride; and his general philanthopy and liberality may eaſily change into unmercifulneſs and cruelty. His famous merits vaniſh away, or become eclipſed by the greateſt faults. His elevation renders him at length ſo contemptible and noxious, that his moderate circumſtances become deſirable and neceſſary to him. Ceaſe then, miſtaken mortals, from accuſing the Lord, if he exalt not his friends to the degree of temporal greatneſs, which you think fit to allot them. He deals with them as a tender and wiſe parent, when he does not place them in circumſtances which

which if not mortal, yet would be extremely hazardous to their integrity and piety, and their everlaſting ſalvation.

Laſtly, ſubjoin yet this conſideration to all the foregoing: Our ſojourn here on earth is only the firſt ſcene of our lives; and we muſt not confine ourſelves to that, if we would judge aright. We ſee, as Chriſtians, an eternity before us, which will very much alter the appearance of things, and perfectly juſtify all the ways of the Lord. The plan of his wiſe government is not yet produced. We ſee only a ſmall part of it in a gleaming and unſteady light. The day of judgment will reveal it to all the world; and all the world will pronounce it righteous, holy, and good. Let it be, then, that the vicious man obtains here on earth the triumph over virtue, let him gratify his extravagant deſires, oppreſs the innocent, and rejoice at the miſery of the poor. Let it be, that he maintains his authority and power to the laſt, and that his coarſe pleaſures

ſures meet with no interruption. Let it be, that the pious eats his bread in tears, and paſſes his days in trouble, that he is deſpiſed and perſecuted, that his whole life, in the eyes of the ſenſual, is a ſeries of adverſe events and diſagreeable occurrences. I ſee another ſcene approaching, that is incomparably more important. I ſee the Judge of the world appear, and hear him ſummoning mankind before him. What an unexpected alteration, what a glorious elucidation of the greateſt difficulties, is produced by this majeſtic entrance! Here I behold the proud, the tyrants, before whoſe anger whole nations trembled, fighing under the dominion of virtue and innocence. Aſhamed, they caſt their eyes upon the earth; they ſhudder with diſmay; they meet the ſcorn of angels and of men. There I ſee the ſlaves of Mammon, who heaped up unrighteous treaſures. They are diveſted of all. Their ſordid paſſions fill them with confuſion, and they feel the extremity of diſtreſs, an irreparable want. Here I deſcry the voluptu-

ary, who made ſenſuality his god, and knew no other pleaſures than thoſe he enjoyed in common with the beaſts. He cannot bear the looks of his Judge. His heart is rent with vehement anguiſh; a thouſand unavailing wiſhes torment him; and the remembrance of his deceitful luſts are an inexhauſtible ſource of ſorrow to him.—There, on the other hand, I behold the virtuous, the friend of God, whom the others accounted wretched, who was the ſport of fickle fortune, and an object of oppreſſion and ſcorn. How bright his countenance! How great the luſtre that ſurrounds him! What aweful dignity beams from his eyes! What tranquillity and ſatisfaction animate his features! The day of his redemption is come! The Judge is his friend, and he ſtands in the moſt intimate connection with him. He is numbered among the children of God; the very angels honour him, and rejoice in his ſociety. He is arrived at the end of his ſorrows; his virtue is rewarded for ever;

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and he is put in poſſeſſion of a felicity that will never be liable to diminution or decay. How richly is he now requited for his humiliations and poverty! What a glorious conqueſt he has gained over all temptations and foes! How nobly is his patience crowned, how ample the rewards of his attachment to God!—Wilt thou ſtill venture to aſk, O thou of little faith! Have I cleanſed my heart in vain, and waſhed my hands in innocency? What are thy preſent afflictions, when compared with the joys of heaven? What the ſorrows of this world, when ſet againſt the greatneſs of thy future glory? Rather be ſtruck with remorſe for every thought, every word that has ever eſcaped thee, againſt the wiſdom and goodneſs of thy Sovereign Ruler. Beware for the future of raſh and ungrounded judgements on the ways of the Lord and on the fortunes of men. Confeſs, that neither the ſeeming proſperity of the impious, nor the apparent adverſity of the pious, on earth, impeach in any wiſe,

the righteouſneſs and perfection of our God. Follow therefore the precept of the ſage king in his Proverbs: "Fret not thyſelf becauſe of evil men; neither be thou envious at the wicked. For there ſhall be no reward to the evil man; the candle of the wicked ſhall be put out."

Allow me to couclude theſe conſiderations with a few ſhort rules of rational and chriſtian conduct.

The firſt is: Never pronounce, from the outward proſperity or adverſity of a man, upon the moral frame of his heart and manners. You will in moſt caſes be deceived, and fall into an extremely improper ſeverity towards the poor. The preceding remarks muſt have taught you, that the poſſeſſion or the want of the goods of this life ſtands in no immediate and neceſſary connection with virtue and vice. The friends of Job, and their unjuſt behaviour

haviour towards that innocent man, may ſerve you as a warning, and make you cautious in your judgements.

The other rules of behaviour are theſe: Strive after a real and conſtant happineſs, and ſeek it there where it is actually to be found. Apply yourſelf above all things to the cultivation, the improvement, and the ſanctification of your ſpirit, which is framed for eternity. Endeavour at the eſſential and permament advantages which integrity and piety, the knowledge and practice of religion, procure their votaries. Make it your ſatisfaction and your glory to ſecure the favour and the grace of God, to have the teſtimony of a good conſcience, and to cheriſh the hopes of everlaſting bliſs. So will your honour and your pleaſures be independent on events, on time and opinion. You will pity the ſlave of vice, inſtead of envying his ſeeming ſucceſſes. You will even be undiſturbed, ſerene, and

ſatisfied, amid the greateſt revolutions of your outward affairs.

Be frequently occupied in pious meditation on the infinite grandeur and majeſty of God. Trace his ways with attention, and carefully ſtudy the beautiful regularity of them. Connect eternity with time, and never think on the preſent without directing your view to the future.—How profitable would theſe reflections be to us! How much would they ſhame our pride, and chide us for our froward judgements on the dealings of God! How victoriouſly would they anſwer all our reproaches of his government! We ſhould feel our unworthineſs in the moſt ſenſible manner, and ſeem as nothing in the immenſe extent of his divine domain. We ſhould fall down and adore his majeſty. We ſhould be ſtill, and know that he is God, that his ways are holy and juſt. The faireſt hopes, the moſt glorious expectations, would rejoice

joice our ſouls, ſtrengthen our virtue, and confirm our bliſs. With conviction and ſentiment we ſhould exclaim: To the only wiſe God, the infinite and eternal, be aſcribed all praiſe and glory for ever and ever!

PART II.

FROM the words of the wiſe king we took occaſion laſt Sunday to juſtify the ways of God, and to ſhew you that the outward welfare of many impious, and the imaginary or real miſery of many pious perſons, here on earth, is by no means at variance with the juſtice of the divine adminiſtration. To this end, we took into conſideration the ſeveral characters and fortunes of men. We made it appear to you, how eaſy it is for us to form erroneous judgements on their hearts, their conduct, and their moral frame, and how ſeldom we are in a capacity to place a man with complete aſſurance either in the claſs of the wicked, or in the ſociety of the juſt. Theſe remarks have taught us to be cautious

tious and circumſpect in our judgements, and to leave the judiciary ſentence on the merits of mortals to Him alone to whom all hearts are open. We compared the outward proſperity of the vicious with the ſuppoſed miſery of the virtuous. We contraſted the unſtable and frequently the cumberſome riches, the uncertain honours, and the deceitful pleaſures, which ſeem to confer ſo great an advantage on the former above the latter, with the tranquillizing teſtimony of a good conſcience, with the aſſurance of the favour and the grace of the Almighty, with the peace of mind and the chearful expectation of eternal bliſs, enjoyed by the ſincere worſhipers of God and virtue; and we found that theſe advantages are infinitely greater and more laſting than thoſe. The intimate and infallible knowledge God has of the meaſure of the abilities and capacities of his creatures, furniſhed us with a new fund of repoſe. We ſaw that the Omniſcient beſt

knows what place is fitteſt for each of his ſubjects to fill, what advantages, what goods, or what trials and adverſities, are ſerviceable and profitable to each of his human offſpring; and that very often it is purely the effect of his paternal love, that he denies us a brilliant but dangerous ſucceſs. We, laſtly, adverted to that diſcriminating day of judgement and retribution, when each ſhall be rewarded according to his works; when the voice which now proudly carries its head on high, ſhall be utterly aſhamed and confounded; when the virtue which now ſighs in obſcurity and woe, ſhall be crowned with glory and honour; when the former ſhall reap the univerſal ſcorn, and this the pure applauſe of an aſſembled world. All theſe conſiderations juſtified us in rejecting with abhorrence every reproach on the providence of God; nay, they laid us under obligation to adore in reverential ſilence the ways of the Lord, and to confeſs them righteous

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and holy. We have therefore ample reaſon for quieting ourſelves fully, and to ſtifle every complaint on the unequal diſtribution of the goods of life. But, can we too frequently employ ourſelves in meditations on the perfection of the government of the Moſt High, and the wiſdom and kindneſs of his conduct towards the human race? Can we too ſedulouſly combat the querulity and diſſatisfaction by which mortals ſo frequently ſin againſt their Creator and Lord? How ingenious is their pride in giving artful turns to the feebleſt doubts, and how difficult is it to conquer prejudices, which are flattered by the paſſions, and ſupported by impetuous luſts? Let us therefore ſtill devote one morning more to the farther

Juſtification of divine providence in regard to the earthly welfare of the impious and the pious. We have ſtill various arguments in hand, which raiſe the Sovereign

Ruler of the world above all ſuſpicion of arbitrary partiality; and I hope the diſcuſſion of them will communicate a freſh portion of ſtrength and certainty to your conviction that all the ways of God are good and exempt from all reproach. I will compriſe my obſervations in four chief articles.

The firſt is this: We muſt conſider the fortunes of men, not ſingly and apart from their connection, but in their coherence with each other. All the events of this world are in very many reſpects moſt intimately combined together, and it cannot otherwiſe happen but that this muſt have good or bad effects on all ſucceeding times; conſequences which the wiſe Ruler of the world, who acts by general laws, but rarely removes, and never without the moſt important motives. How many proſperous and adverſe revolutions and events befall us and others, which we hold for unfitting

unfitting and contradictory; and yet wherein we ſhould not perceive the ſmalleſt appearance of diſorder or contrariety, were we ſharp-ſighted enough to penetrate their combination with remoter and to us unknown occurrences, from which they take their riſe? Many fortunes of men, which ſeem to us to militate with the rules of a wiſe providence, belong in like manner to this claſs.—Why does ſuch a ſinner poſſeſs a flouriſhing condition? Why does he live in ſuperfluity? Probably the root of it lies in the former proſperity of ſome righteous anceſtor, whoſe name, by long ſucceſſion of time, is fallen into oblivion. The Lord had rewarded the virtue and piety of this righteous perſon even with terreſtrial advantages. Shall we then charge him with injuſtice, if he does not totally deprive the vicious poſterity of this good man of the ſtill continuing effects of that bleſſing, ſince he has expreſsly promiſed to ſhew mercy to the thouſandth ſucceſſor of him that

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fears him? Why, on the other hand, muſt ſuch a pious man ſtruggle with poverty and want? Why muſt he forego the chief conveniencies of life? Probably the ground of it lies in the penalty of one or other of his impious progenitors; and the combination of things brings certain ſufferings and hardſhips on him, which he has not procured by his own perſonal tranſgreſſions. His adverſe fortunes are no penalty of his ſins; but are the unavoidable effects of the tranſgreſſion, or the faulty conduct, of ſuch perſons as lived before him, and with whom, by birth, or ſome other way, he ſtands in a very intimate connection. Shall the Lord work miracles for repelling the natural conſequences of his good and righteous government? Shall he annull the union of cauſes with their effects, and by ſuch a revolution in the moral condition of a man, change likewiſe his outward circumſtances, and his reference towards things without him? Rather are not even theſe ways of

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the Moſt High full of wiſdom and goodneſs? How forcibly muſt it allure us to virtue, when we ſee that its benefits are ſo diffuſive and laſting; when we know that it extends in certain reſpects even to a degenerate and vicious poſterity! How hurtful, how deſtructive, how deteſtable, muſt ſin appear to us, when we are taught by experience, that even the righteous muſt frequently taſte the bitter fruits of the exceſſes of their anceſtors, and ſigh under the lamentable conſequences of their tranſgreſſions! The claims of virtue, however, are the ultimate aim of all the diſpenſations of heaven; and this ſingle remark is already a ſufficient anſwer to every allegation brought by corrupted men againſt the equity of the government of the Moſt High.

The ſecond remark is this: God has, not more in all nature than in regard to human fortunes, indiſſolubly connected means

means and ends together; and no man will eaſily reach the latter, who either is not willing, or is not able, to uſe the former. Terreſtrial proſperity is partly dependent on certain endowments, capacities and aptitudes, which have no neceſſary connection either with virtue or with vice; but generally are founded in the nature of man, in the frame of his education, in his outward circumſtances, and the like. Theſe advantages may be wanting to the ſincereſt friend of virtue, or he may have but a ſlender portion of them: whereas the moſt vicious may poſſeſs them in a high degree of perfection, and in all theſe reſpects far tranſcend the former. But who ſees not that this diſtinction muſt have a very great influence on their reſpective temporal ſucceſs, by the natural order of things? We will draw a compariſon between two men; one vicious, who has great capacity of mind, who is well verſed in all uſeful arts and ſciences, and is active and lively by nature; and one virtuous, who poſſeſſes but

but ſmall or moderate capacities, who received but a bad education, and is withal of a ſlow and drowſy temperament. They both endeavour at advancing their outward welfare. The former attains his end in a ſhort time, and renders himſelf and his family proſperous. This never reaches his aim; all his ſchemes are fruſtrated; all his endeavours are fruitleſs and loſt. You are ſhocked at their unequal fortunes: you hold it for a conſiderable matter of reproach againſt the equity of the divine adminiſtration. But you forget the true ground of the difference of their outward well-being. The former, the vicious man, has a diffuſive and juſt knowledge of the beſt and fitteſt means which conduce to the promotion of his views; he underſtands how to make uſe of all circumſtances of time, place, and perſons; he is even attentive to the very ſmalleſt trifles that may in any wiſe retard or advance him; in all his reſolves, he takes the future as well as the preſent

preſent into the account; he can diſcern the far remote and the leaſt obſervable conſequences of things: this, the virtuous, on the contrary, has but a feeble inſight in the affairs of life; his attentiveneſs is ſoon wearied; his perſpicacity is very limited; and either from ignorance or from natural ſloth, he lets the beſt opportunities of advancing his fortune eſcape. The former has learnt, by reflection and experience, to try the tempers of men, to ſearch out their latent propenſities, and to uſe in his intercourſes with them the needful precaution and prudence. The latter, from the want of this knowledge, is credulous; he acts inconſiderately and with too much precipitancy; the confidence he repoſes in others is too great, and he is cheated by every pretender. The other is firm and undiſmayed in his endeavours; the hindrances he meets with, inſtead of diminiſhing, increaſe his caution, and renew his ardour; he frequently hazards a part of his proper-

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ty, and pays no regard even to ſome conſiderable loſs, when it facilitates the way to ſome greater advantage: this, on the contrary is timorous; every unexpected oppoſition confounds him; he allows himſelf to be frightened from the purſuit of his deſign, and the ſmalleſt diſappointment diſpirits him. How then, in ſuch circumſtances, can it be otherwiſe, but that the former muſt advance much farther in the furtherance of his earthly proſperity than the latter, though that man be vicious, and this be virtuous? Or can we require, with any appearance of reaſon, that the natural order of things ſhould be inverted, that ignorance, heedleſſneſs, and ſloth, ſhould be productive of the ſame or even of better conſequences, than induſtry, circumſpection, and knowledge?

The third remark is this: The great corruption that prevails among mankind, and is always extending itſelf farther, may

make it eaſy of comprehenſion, why outward proſperity is often more favourable to the impious than to the pious. Were virtue more common among mortals than it actually is; ſhe would undoubtedly be more honoured, more revered, more powerful, and more ſucceſsful. Her friends and followers would certainly have leſs ſcorn, perſecution, and oppreſſion to fear; ſhe would eaſily triumph over vice, and defeat without difficulty her unjuſt attacks. But how totally different is the moral condition of mankind! The majority have ſurrendered themſelves to the ſway of their ſenſual deſires; they are the ſervants of ſin, and adhere to the earth. Human ſociety is not what it might and ought to be; it is corrupt to an eminent degree. Would any one raiſe himſelf from the duſt of poverty and contempt? Would he acquire dignity and wealth? The way by which he may attain his end, without violating his duties, does not always lead, it leads but ſlowly,

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to this ſplendid mark. Will a man ſuddenly approach it, will he at all events be rich; then muſt he frequently employ ſuch means as Chriſtianity expreſsly condemns, as conſcience abſolutely forbids, as are incompatible with integrity and virtue. Flattery, duplicity, and falſhood, is the way that uſually conducts to exalted ſtations. Injuſtice, covetouſneſs, and fraud, are the impure ſources from whence riches are not ſeldom to be drawn, and treaſure accumulated on treaſure. Pride, cruelty, and violence, are but too often the foundation of authority and reſpect. Is it a matter of wonder then, if the vicious man, who knows no law but his luſts and paſſions, ſhould more rapidly advance on his career than the virtuous, who follows the precepts of religion and conſcience with inviolable fidelity? Is it a matter of wonder, if the juſt, who avoids even the appearance of evil, who abhors all kinds of deceit, who is firmly reſolved rather to loſe

all than infringe on his duties, or act againſt the will of his Creator and Redeemer, if this, I ſay, remains in obſcurity and want, while the other, who burſts the moſt ſacred ties, deſpiſes the commandments of the Lord, and ſeeks nothing but his own advantage, mounts aloft, and, according to the expreſſion of holy ſcripture, "flouriſhes like a green bay-tree? No; ſince God will yet maintain the human race, corrupted as it is, and ſince he does not ſee fit to remove this corruption by a miracle of his omnipotence, or to alter the wiſe laws of his government; we are not to be aſtoniſhed, if here on earth there be juſt men unto whom it happeneth according to the work of the wicked: and if, again, there be wicked men to whom it happeneth according to the work of the righteous.

The fourth and laſt remark is this: The diſappointments which God allows to befall the pious, are highly advantageous to them

them in many reſpects. They are very frequently manifeſt demonſtrations of the love of their heavenly Father, and produce the faireſt fruits of righteouſneſs in their hearts and life. I know that, at firſt ſight, this appears a contradiction. It ſeldom comes into our minds, that poverty, contempt, pain, ſickneſs, or other diſagreeable events, are conducive to our benefit. We behold all theſe things as mere ſources of trouble and miſery, and their outward aſpect has in truth nothing lovely in it. But notwithſtanding this, it remains an undeniable fact, that whom the Lord loveth he chaſteneth, and that his corrections have nothing in view but their true and everlaſting felicity. We need only lay aſide our prejudice, and conſider the chaſtiſements of heaven with impartial eyes, for plainly perceiving their great utility. This is peculiarly manifeſt in the following particulars.

Afflictions produce in the chriſtian a lively ſentiment of the emptineſs and frailty of all the advantages and goods of the earth. They make him more attentive to the diſpoſitions of his ſpirit, and inſpire him with an effective zeal to work out his ſalvation with fear and trembling. How often is outward proſperity dangerous to the ſoul and the ſalvation of him that has it! How eaſily may the continual diſpoſitions that are attendant on it ſtifle the voice of reaſon, and ſuppreſs the ſuggeſtions of conſcience! How manifold and ſtrong are the temptations to vanity, to careleſſneſs, to an extravagant and diſſolute life, which ſurround the ſucceſsful, and how hard muſt it be for him to withſtand the incitements to evil! How difficult it is, in ſuch circumſtances, to paſs a right judgment on the value of earthly things, and not to eſteem them higher, and to love them more, than their nature and appointment require!—Conſider the darling of fortune,

fortune, and the deplorable condition into which it has thrown him. The deceitful ſplendor with which he is ſurrounded offuſcates his mind, and darkens his ſpirit. His riches, his honours, his authority, attract all his attention to themſelves. They ſo much employ him, that the thoughts of God, of Chriſt, of religion, and of the purport of his Being, can find no entrance into his ſoul; that the moſt exalted and moſt important truths make little or no impreſſion on his heart. He is totally enamoured with the goods of the world, and fooliſhly repoſes in the uncertain and momentary enjoyment of them. He forgets his Creator and Benefactor; he grounds his comfort, his hope, his confidence, in things which are merely dependent on events, which are utterly unable to render their poſſeſſor truly happy. Seldom or never does he think on eternity; and his ſpirit, which is endowed with ſuch great capacities, and is immortal, remains ig-

norant and vicious. Death, at length, overtakes him, and his imaginary happineſs is departed for ever. He is deſtitute of all real and permanent goods, and futurity is terrible to him. On the other hand, conſider the pious, whoſe fortune is nothing deſirable, who lives in poverty and want, and has many a hardſhip to bear. How forcibly does his condition convince him, of the vanity and emptineſs of all earthly things! How clearly does he ſee the deceitfulneſs of ſenſe, and the nihility of human grandeur! In what a lucid order does he perceive the deſtination of man, and the inſufficiency of all wherein the ſinner ſeeks his ſatisfaction and repoſe! How forcibly does this knowledge incite him to withdraw his heart from the world, and to direct his deſires to worthier and more durable objects! How agreeable, how comfortable to him, is the conſideration of the future world; and what beautiful fruits of righteouſneſs muſt theſe views and conſiderations

rations produce in him! He reckons himſelf only a gueſt and a ſtranger upon earth, and heaven is his country. The improvement of his heart, the exaltation of his nobler faculties, the increaſe of his good diſpoſitions, is his principal and deareſt concern. His whole life is a ſerious preparation for the ſtate of perfection and happineſs that awaits him beyond the grave. He thinks, without fear, of his end; and even deſires to be diſſolved, and to be with Chriſt.

Again, afflictions not only weaken our too great attachment to that which is viſible and tranſient; but they quicken, they ſtrengthen and confirm the faireſt virtues in the human ſoul. How eaſily may flouriſhing circumſtances lead us to proud reflections! What is more common than for the fortunate man to aſcribe to himſelf the greateſt merits, to eſteem himſelf the ſole or the principal author of his ſucceſs,

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to deſpiſe his inferiors, to forget whereof he is made, and not to remind himſelf that he will ſhortly return to duſt again! But adverſities teach a man to think more reaſonably. He immediately feels the ſovereignty of God over all; he is ſenſible of his entire dependence on that moſt exalted being, and, in humble ſubmiſſion, adores his will. He gives the Lord the honour due unto him, and he is heard to exclaim in complete conviction: Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto thy name be the praiſe. The Lord maketh poor, and maketh rich: he bringeth low, and lifteth up. He raiſeth the poor out of the duſt, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to ſet them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory. He doth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can ſtay his hand, or ſay unto him, What doeſt thou? And how ingenious is our ſelf-love to extenuate our faults,

faults, and to attribute to our good qualities a greater value than they really have! How willingly do we conceal ourſelves from our own inſpection! How carefully do we hide our miſdeeds! How rarely does it happen, that a man, in the quiet enjoyment of all the pleaſures and comforts of life, impartially examines his heart, and labours at his improvement with becoming ſolicitude! His glittering fortune prevents him from yielding to ſilent reflection on his moral condition, which is, however, the ſource from whence wiſdom muſt flow. He is ſtunned with the tumult of clamorous luſts. He thinks he is rich, and increaſed with goods, and has need of nothing; and knoweth not that he is wretched, and miſerable, and poor, and blind, and naked. But does the Lord ſeek to fetch us home by loving-correction; then the erroneous ideas we had formed of our moral goodneſs, and of our fancied deſerts, all vaniſh away; then we are aſhamed

aſhamed of the paltry artifice by which we endeavoured to impoſe on ourſelves. We think in earneſt on ourſelves; we prove and examine our hearts and our actions. We ſee ourſelves then as we actually are. We feel our weakneſs; we perceive the multitude of ſins, of failings and crimes, that render us reprobate in the ſight of God; we bewail our miſery; we deplore our tranſgreſſions; we form the fixt purpoſe to amend; we vow to the Moſt High a voluntary and conſtant obedience. In this caſe who is there but muſt confeſs, It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy ſtatutes! Before I was afflicted I went aſtray; but now have I kept thy word! In this manner are the adverſities that befall us not unfrequently the abundant ſources of patience, of contentment, of confidence and hope. They teach us to wean our hearts from ſublunary things. They call us to place all our truſt on the grace and ſupport of the Almighty.

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They incite us to prayer, and to accept and apply the divine promiſes in faith. They cauſe us to feel the high worth of religion, and the whole efficacy of its heavenly comforts. They inſpire us with amiable and gentle diſpoſitions towards our neighbour; diſpoſitions which are the ornaments of humanity and the characteriſtics of the chriſtian. They make us ſenſible to the diſtreſſes of others, and fill us with the ſincereſt compaſſion towards the poor and neceſſitous. But are not theſe the nobleſt and moſt reſpectable qualities? Are they not virtues wherein the chriſtian muſt be continually exerciſed, if he would be a worthy follower of his Lord, and become like unto him? Is not, in particular, the love of our fellow creatures, and univerſal kindneſs, the faireſt feature in the image of God, which the chriſtian bears? Shall we then complain, if the Father of men ſhould viſit his children with various ſorrows, ſince they are ſo advantageous to virtue,

virtue, and promote the perfection of the ſpirit in every way?

In fine, the obſtacles and difficulties the virtuous man meets on his courſe, add a ſuperior value to his integrity and virtue, and augment their gracious reward. The Moſt High thus proves the faith, the integrity, the perſeverance of his worſhipers. He gives them opportunity to exerciſe themſelves in all, even the ſevereſt duties, to manifeſt the vigour of their virtue, and to become ſhining examples of it. He would make them conformable to Chriſt, their leader and lord, who entered into his glory by the path of ſufferings. He would graciouſly recompenſe the fidelity and perſeverance of the chriſtian who has ſtood out theſe trials, with a peculiar degree of his favour, with the moſt bleſſed prerogatives in the life to come. Virtue firſt ſhews herſelf in all her real dignity in the time of need. We have but little cauſe to admire

mire the contentedneſs, the liberality, the gratitude, of the opulent man, who lives in ſuperfluity, and knows nothing of hardſhips. His outward fortune undoubtedly deprives his good qualities and actions of much of their value. But conſider the chriſtian who paſſes his days in miſery, and obſerve the luſtre his virtues caſt around him. Poverty and want oppreſs him; and yet he is contented. He is hated unjuſtly, tormented, perſecuted without a cauſe; and yet he is patient. Providence deprives him of the perſons who were his principal earthly delight, the comfort of his age; and yet murmurs he not againſt the will of his Creator, but with complacency ſubmits himſelf to it. All things ſeem combined to his misfortune and ruin; but he relinquiſhes not his hope, and lets not his truſt in the help of the Lord forſake him. Every day brings him freſh cauſe for dejection, and to retire from the ſervice of deſpiſed devotion; but he is ſtedfaſt and im-

moveable, and nothing can terrify him from the career of righteouſneſs, from the path of life. Eaſy means are pointed out to him for bettering his wretched condition, and for promoting his earthly welfare, if he will but relax from his virtuous ſeverity, if he will but ſubmit to ſome oblique tranſactions; but he remains conſtant, and no temptation is able to turn him aſide from his purpoſe of living after the will of God, and of keeping a conſcience void of offence. What a value muſt ſuch a tried virtue poſſeſs in the ſight of God, the impartial ſcrutator of human deſert! He may make a ſure reckoning on an additional portion of his clemency. What a reverence muſt theſe deciſive proofs of his faith, of his truſt, and his integrity, give him in the eyes of angels! Thoſe happy ſpirits are witneſſes of his becoming diſpoſitions, and his magnanimous actions. They ſpread his praiſe through heaven, and make remoteſt worlds acquainted with his

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worthy name. And what happy retribution has not ſuch an one thenceforward to expect! He will receive, as a conqueror, the unfading crown of glory. He will fill an eminent ſtation in the kingdom of the juſt. His dignity and his glory will be proportionate to his fidelity. Who then does not ſee from all this, that the troubles of this life every way promote the real felicity of the pious? Who but muſt confeſs with the apoſtle, We know that all things work together for good, to them that love God?

If this then be the caſe, ſhould you any longer be ſhocked, if you know any virtuous perſons who find themſelves in outward circumſtances of diſtreſs; ſince you ſee that the firm endurance of them is the foundation of their eternal honour, and their higheſt advantage? Or, ſhall you ſtill venture to charge the Ruler of the world with injuſtice, if, in the diſtribution

of the goods and advantages of the earth, he does not always regard the good or ill frame of the man, but proceeds upon general laws; ſince you know that our preſent ſtate is not a ſtate of retribution, but of diſcipline and trial? No! much rather confeſs that the Lord even then acts with wiſdom and kindneſs, when he allows the pious to contend with misfortunes, and to experience the moſt cutting diſappointments. Confeſs, that all his ways are holy, juſt, and good, and that they have nothing in view but our true felicity. Humbly adore his will, and never impatiently repine at the diſpenſations of his providence. Strive to render yourſelves well-pleaſing to him by holineſs and virtue; and turn both proſperity and adverſity, both agreeable and diſagreeable events, to the furtherance of this grand deſign. This is your appointment here on earth; and if you fulfill it, you cannot fail to be happy, let every thing elſe go with you as it will. Do

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you find difficulties in the divine government over men; is it ſhrouded at times in clouds and thick darkneſs which you cannot pierce; then never forget, that here we walk by faith, and not by ſight. Conſtantly reflect, that the thoughts of God are not our thoughts, neither are our ways his ways. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, ſo are his ways higher than our ways, and his thoughts than our thoughts. Here our knowledge is like the morning-dawn, where light and darkneſs are at ſtrife together. In that other world the perfect day will firſt appear. There we ſhall behold nature, providence, and religion, unfolded to our ſight. There ſhall we walk in the light of the Lord, and exclaim with all the company of heaven: Halleluia! Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power unto the Lord our God: for true and righteous are his judgements! Praiſe our God, all ye his ſervants, and ye that fear him, both ſmall and great!

THE

PRINCIPAL SOURCES

OF

UNBELIEF.

If our Goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt. 2 Cor. iv. 3.

THE PRINCIPAL SOURCES OF UNBELIEF.

THE more thoroughly the cauſe of an evil is underſtood, the eaſier it is to prevent or remove it. The better informed the phyſician is of the ſource of a diſeaſe, the more ſafely and certainly will he ſet about the cure. Unbelief is an evil that is conſtantly gaining ground at preſent, and brings a hoſt of other evils in its train. It is a diſeaſe of the ſoul, no leſs dangerous than epidemical, and at length

is attended by death and utter deſtruction. But how can we guard againſt this dreadful evil, if we are not acquainted with the true cauſes of it? How can we preſerve ourſelves from this deadly poiſon, this ſpiritual diſeaſe, if the ſources of it are hidden from us? If then this knowledge be ſo needful and ſalutary, I hope you will not now deny me your attention, when my purpoſe is, by the divine aſſiſtance, to bring you acquainted with the principal ſources of unbelief, and to ſhew you how impure and noxious they are.

St. Paul ſays, "If our Goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt." What the apoſtle would imply, from the tenor of his diſcourſe, amounts to this: The Moſaical œconomy, under which our fathers lived, was, no doubt, involved in many obſcurities. There lay, as it were, a mantle over the hearts of the Jews, which hindered them from acknowledging the true purport of the

the law, and obſerving the end of the former covenant. But we Chriſtians ſee with an unimpeded view, as in a mirror, all the glory of the Lord. The Goſpel is a reſplendent light, and we announce it to mankind in plainneſs and ſimplicity. If then, notwithſtanding this, they are not enlightened, and remain incredulous, then the fault lies not in the obſcurity of the doctrine that is preached to them, but in the blindneſs and corruption of their own hearts. They ſhut their eyes againſt the light that is iſſued among them, and voluntarily ruſh on their own deſtruction; a truth that ſtill ſubſiſts in the completeſt evidence. We cannot better explain and demonſtrate it, than by examining, ſomewhat more at large, whence the unbelief, that even at preſent blinds ſo many perſons and makes them unhappy, takes its riſe, and whereby it is, in general, foſtered and maintained. To us, who are confeſſors of Jeſus and his doctrine, it is impoſſible for

for theſe conſiderations to be at all indifferent. The more light, the more comfort, the more happineſs we ſeek and find in this doctrine, ſo much the greater cauſe have we to guard carefully againſt whatever may tend to deprive us of this ineſtimable benefit; and ſo much the more fortunate ſhall I eſteem myſelf, if, by the divine aſſiſtance, I ſhould be able only to preſerve one wavering and doubting chriſtian from the dangerous precipices of unbelief, or bring him back from the brink of ruin. To this end, may the Lord graciouſly bleſs my diſcourſe, and make it contribute to confirm our faith in his well-beloved Son, that we may perſevere in it even unto the end, and hereafter reap of it the reward of fidelity!

Ignorance is the firſt ſource of unbelief; ignorance in regard to the contents of the ſacred writings, and the peculiar doctrines

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of Chriſtianity. How few of thoſe who combat and reject the religion of Jeſus, have ever peruſed the books that compriſe it, with the attention, with the reflection, with the thirſt of knowledge with which we are uſed to read other books, whoſe contents are important and concern us near! How few beſtow the proper pains for acquiring diſtinct and juſt ideas of the maxims of Chriſtianity, for conſidering them in their connection with each other, and for proving with impartiality the evidences of their truth! The majority content themſelves with the dark, perplexed, incompetent, and, generally, falſe conceptions that were given them in their earlieſt youth, or which they afterwards drew for themſelves, not from the right fountains of knowledge, but from turbid and muddy pools; I mean from an imprudent intercourſe with ſcorners and vicious perſons, or from ſuch writings wherein truth and virtue,

tue, decency and good manners, are extremely injured and rendered ridiculous. Such perſons find, when they come to the uſe of their reaſon, manifeſt contradictions in their knowledge; they diſcover ſome errors in what they hitherto believed and held to be truth; they perceive that they have blindly adopted the religion of their fathers, and they ſee that many others do the ſame, without due conſideration; and thence they form the raſh and fooliſh concluſion, that religion itſelf reſts on no ſolid arguments, that they are often contradictory, and that it is all an invention of men. Their prepoſſeſſions, their worldly affairs, their lazineſs, their attachment to ſenſual pleaſures, prevent them thenceforward from giving into copious inquiries, from ſtating theſe reſearches with ſedateneſs and preciſion, from reiterating them frequently, from ſedulouſly uſing the neceſſary means, and from giving ear to the voice of truth,

though

though it never ſo loudly oppoſes their preconceived opinions, and is at variance with their ſenſual deſires. But is it not exceſſively irrational to reject a ſubject which we do not thoroughly underſtand, which we have never inveſtigated with due ſolicitude, and have never taken the pains to examine its nature and frame?

So great is the ignorance of the generality of unbelievers in regard to the materials that are neceſſary to a right underſtanding of the ſacred books. Are we to be ſurpriſed, that in writings of ſo remote antiquity, compoſed in foreign languages, which ſpeak of uſages and cuſtoms diſcontinued for ages, which relate to antient tranſactions and events, which were originally adapted to ſuch nations and perſons whoſe way of thinking and of life, whoſe taſte, whoſe manners, were ſo widely different from ours, and into which, from the

the numberleſs tranſcripts that have been made of them, many errors muſt neceſſarily have ſlipped, particularly in regard to names and numbers, are we to be ſurpriſed, I ſay, that in ſuch writings, and eſpecially in the tranſlations of them, many obſcure paſſages and various difficulties ſhould be met with, which cannot ſo eaſily be removed, and to the ſolution whereof certain kinds of knowledge are requiſite, which cannot be obtained without ſome pains and application? But have the unbelievers this knowledge? Do they not rather betray the groſſeſt ignorance; an ignorance of which people ſhould be aſhamed who ſet up for teachers, and pretend to enlighten the world? For what do we find in the generality of their writings, if we diveſt them of the fallacious ornaments of a frivolous and often counterfeit wit? objections that have been a hundred times anſwered, to the ſatisfaction of all impartial judges, and which are reproduced with

the ſame effrontery as if they had never been noticed before: difficulties which immediately vaniſh away, on conſidering the ſubject in its true point of view; and together with all its circumſtances, and with the neceſſary knowledge of languages and antiquity: manifeſt untruths, or ſuch repreſentations of the doctrines of religion, as have not the leaſt foundation in the holy ſcriptures, and are only the contemptible ſpawn of fanaticiſm and error: in ſhort, a multitude of unpardonable ſins againſt hiſtory, againſt geography, againſt chronology, againſt the nature and complection of oriental languages and manners; of blunders which are at variance with the firſt rules of logic and probability, and teſtify the greateſt partiality; of faults, ſome of which are ſo groſs that a man cannot comprehend how people who make pretenſions to underſtanding and ſcience could commit them without malice prepenſe. But does this imply any thing elſe than voluntarily to

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ſhut one's eyes againſt the light of truth, and to reject it without ſufficient knowledge of the matter, from a blindneſs and ignorance which is not to be excuſed?

The falſe repreſentations which men have not unfrequently made, and ſtill make of the doctrines of Chriſtianity; the obſcurity in which they have been involved inſtead of explained; and the human appendages with which they have been diſfigured; are another ſource of unbelief, which certainly has contributed more to the ſpreading of it, and ſtill contributes, than men in general would eaſily imagine. The Chriſtian religion in itſelf is ſo venerable and amiable; it is ſo exactly fitted to our circumſtances, our wants, and our capacities; the doctrines it brings to our acquaintance are ſo rational, ſo worthy of God, ſo important, ſo comfortable, and withal ſo plainly revealed; the rules for our conduct it gives us are ſo holy, ſo

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conſiſtent, ſo adapted to promote the particular and general happineſs of mankind; the rites it preſcribes are ſo few in number, and ſo eaſy to be obſerved, and their import is ſo level with even the meaneſt capacity; the arguments, in ſhort, whereon it reſts, are ſo various, ſo ſolid, ſo uncontrovertible, that it is impoſſible for any unbiaſſed friend of truth, to know this heavenly religion in its native ſimplicity, its original purity, its inherent dignity, without doing homage to it, and accepting it as the coſtlieſt gift of heaven, with gratitude and joy. But, if we would ſpeak impartially, can we deny that Chriſtianity, partly by accident, and partly by the weakneſs and fanciful conduct of its profeſſors and teachers, has loſt much of its primitive ſimplicity and beauty, and that it is ſtill at preſent, in many places, disfigured by ſundry errors and appendages, and proportionably brought into contempt? The greateſt part of mankind have little taſte

for what is ſimple, what is eaſy and plain. They love the extraordinary, the difficult, the incomprehenſible, the myſterious. They adhere more to what merely employs the underſtanding and the imagination, than what tends to the improvement of their heart, and the amendment of their life. They would willingly know much, but practiſe little. Thus has it fared with the Chriſtian doctrine. The peculiar deſign of it has often been ſet aſide, and conſidered, not ſo much as a practical, as a theoretical ſcience. Men have arbitrarily endeavoured to define many matters which the apoſtles of our Lord have left undefined. They have perplexed and obſcured the plaineſt and moſt comprehenſible inſtruction it gives us of the moſt important doctrines of ſalvation, by various unintelligible terms of art, and by a miſapplied profuſion of ſcholaſtic learning. They have altered in part the holy rites it enjoins, taken no note of their natural import, and changed them into incompre-

comprehenſible, nay, contradictory myſteries. They have unneceſſarily multiplied the points of belief; exalted difficult hypotheſes and doubtful propoſitions to the rank of demonſtrated and undeniable truths; increaſed the ceremonies of public worſhip to an enormous degree, and thereby perplexed the minds and aggrieved the conſciences of Chriſtians. The time would fail me, were I to adduce the examples hereof; they are not unknown to ſuch as are converſant in the hiſtory of the Chriſtian church, and its preſent conſtitution. However, who does not ſee how much all theſe abuſes have contributed, and ſtill contribute, to the advancement of unbelief? Does not daily experience teach us, that the greateſt part, that the moſt conſiderable of the objections produced by unbelievers, are grounded ſolely on the falſe repreſentations that have been given them of the Chriſtian doctrine, or on the commixtures and additions with which it has

been adulterated in the congregations wherein they have been born and brought up? But who ſees not likewiſe, that this neither juſtifies nor excuſes the unbeliever? Have we not the writings of the evangeliſts and apoſtles in our own hands? Are we wanting in any of the neceſſary means to a right underſtanding of them? Is it not incumbent on us to examine ourſelves what is delivered to us as a revelation from heaven, and not to build our faith on the declarations of fallible men, but on the infallible documents of the God of truth? Or is it perhaps reaſonable to refuſe aſſent to the truth, becauſe it ſometimes appears in company with error, or to reject a doctrine for no other reaſon but becauſe it is not always rightly delivered? Would the thirſty refuſe to drink of the ſtream which croſſes his path, and which is both abundant and pure, becauſe channels have been cut from it which are lutulent and unwholeſome? And in what a brilliant light

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are not, eſpecially in our days, the doctrines of Chriſtianity placed! How critically, how impartially have they been proved and demonſtrated! What pains have been ſpared for purging them from all foreign commixtures, for determining the importance and the degree of certainty of each of its axioms, and to deliver the Goſpel to mankind in its native ſimplicity and luſtre? How many excellent writings of this kind have in our century made their appearance! Shall we not be criminal then in the higheſt degree, if we make no uſe of them, and bring charges againſt the Chriſtian religion, which are founded ſolely on our deficiency of knowledge, and the falſe ideas we have of it?

Pride is the third ſource of the unbelief that prevails. Thoſe who ſuffer themſelves to be domineered by this vice, are the ſlaves of vanity. As ſuch, they would elevate themſelves above others; they

would diſtinguiſh themſelves from the crowd; they would be wiſer than the reſt of mankind. They hold it diſgraceful, in reference to the advantageous opinion they have of their own penetration, to think and to judge as other men do. The farther, therefore, they keep from the opinions and way of thinking of others, the greater and more exalted are they in their own imagination. Hence it comes, that they have no taſte for truths which are alike received and credited by all. Hence it comes, that they aſſent to the moſt extraordinary propoſitions without much reflection, merely becauſe they are extraordinary. What is ſingular and out of the way has ſo many charms for them, that they graſp and maintain it without ſo much as examining whether it be good or bad, true or falſe, uſeful or prejudicial. Thus they act in regard to the things of this world. Nothing is agreeable to them if it be not extraordinary and rare. They deſpiſe what

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is common, though never ſo beautiful in itſelf, never ſo excellent and wholeſome. So likewiſe do they act in regard to religion. As they reject and deride it now, becauſe even the mechanic and the day-labourer, the meaneſt among the people, has the happineſs to know and to believe it; ſo would they profeſs and maintain it, if infidelity were common and prevalent. But is it not an unpardonable folly, in a matter of the higheſt importance, to purſue a method which no man of ſound underſtanding and a good taſte would adopt in the ordinary occurrences of life? Is the truth or the falſhood of a propoſition to be judged of by the greater or ſmaller number of its adherents and defenders? May there not be juſt as well truths which are acknowledged and revered by a great part of mankind, as there may be errors which have been ſpread far and wide over the face of the earth? Is it not an incomprehenſible abſurdity to ſacrifice the in-

tereſts of one's immortal ſpirit, and the hope of everlaſting felicity, to the vain deſire of diſtinguiſhing oneſelf from others? What ſhould we think of the prudence of any one who ſhould leave the plain and ſafe highway, only becauſe it is plain and ſafe, and ſtrike off into the moſt dangerous by paths for reaching the place to which he was bound?

Pride hinders a man from relinquiſhing the opinions he has once embraced, or retracting the errors he has long maintained. It hinders him from examining afreſh the matter on which he has before decidedly pronounced, and purſuing this examination with greater attention and care than he has hitherto given it. Should he do this, ſhould he actually alter his ſentiments, then muſt he acknowledge his weakneſs and ignorance; he muſt allow that he has been premature and deceived in his judgements; he muſt grant that others excel him

him in perſpicacity, in wiſdom, and knowledge. But how hard muſt it be to the proud ſpirit to make ſuch a humiliating confeſſion, and ſo far to deny his darling propenſity!

In ſhort, the whole contents of the Chriſtian doctrine are ſo framed, that it is impoſſible for the proud to have any reliſh for them. They repreſent all men as ſinners, who act contrary to their duties, who thus render themſelves unworthy of the divine complacency and favour, who deſerve puniſhment, who have need of a Saviour and Redeemer, who are fallen into a ſtate of infirmity and corruption, and are in want of a particular divine aſſiſtance for being delivered from it. They deny all merit to man; they aſcribe every benefit we poſſeſs to the free bounty, grace, and clemency of God. They place the outward diſtinctions of power, of riches, of authority, of which mortals think ſo highly,

in their proper light, deprive them of their dazzling luſtre, and pronounce them to be objects of ſmall importance. They will have us to eſteem virtue and piety more than crowns and ſceptres, and to reſpect and love all men as our brethren. They require meekneſs and modeſty of us; they will that we exalt not ourſelves over others, that we ſtrive not after high things, never loſe ſight of our unworthineſs and weakneſs; that we conſtantly be ſenſible of our dependance on the Sovereign Being; that we pray to God for all real goods in an humble ſenſe of our wants and demerits, expect all things from him, thank him for all, and confide in him alone; that we be patient in adverſity, contented with all things, and never repine at the diſpenſations of heaven. Are we then to be much ſurpriſed, that a man who is a ſlave to vanity and pride, ſhould reject a doctrine ſo manifeſtly oppoſite to his way of thinking,

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to his inclinations and views, which requires of him ſuch coſtly offerings?

This conſideration leads us to a fourth ſource of unbelief, which no doubt contributes much to the ſpreading and cheriſhing of this evil. It is the moral corruption of mankind; it is the ſenſual luſts and paſſions by which they allow themſelves to be governed, againſt which however the Goſpel declares open war, which it condemns, and which it manages with the ſevereſt puniſhments. The Chriſtian doctrine is holy; it requires of its profeſſor an upright heart, generous ſentiments, honeſt views, an inoffenſive and virtuous conduct. It inſiſts, that he cleanſe himſelf from all filthineſs of the fleſh and ſpirit, perfecting holineſs in the fear of God; that he die unto ſin, and live again unto righteouſneſs; that he add to his faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and

to patience, godlineſs; and to godlineſs, brotherly kindneſs; and to brotherly-kindneſs, charity; that he eſcape the corruption that is in the world through luſt, and be a partaker of the divine nature. It demands, that whatſoever things are true, whatſoever things are honeſt, whatſoever things are juſt, whatſoever things are pure, whatſoever things are lovely, whatſoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praiſe, to think on theſe things; that he be a burning and a ſhining light in the midſt of the crooked and perverſe generation of this world; that he be a follower of God, and imitate Chriſt his lord and maſter, and conſtantly ſtrive to copy him nearer. Theſe, theſe are the principal poſitions that have alarmed corrupted men againſt the Chriſtian doctrine, and have driven them to liſten to their deceitful hearts, to doubt of its truth, and to reject it with unbelief. If the Goſpel contented itſelf with a bare aſſent

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to certain doctrines, or with the outward obſervance of certain forms and ceremonies; if it allowed mankind to be at reſt in their ſins, and yet flattered them with the hope of a bleſſed immortality; if at leaſt it connived at their boſom-ſins, encouraged their darling propenſities, how willingly would they give credit to all its injunctions! how zealouſly would they obſerve its ceremonies, though they were attended with pains and expence! But the caſe is quite otherwiſe. He that will be my diſciple, ſays our Saviour, let him deny himſelf, and take up his croſs and follow me. Strive to enter in at the ſtraight gate, for many will ſeek to enter in, and ſhall not be able. Theſe requiſites, theſe terms, are not agreeable to the ſinner. This ſelf-denial, this following of Jeſus, this ſtriving after eternal felicity, is not to his taſte. He cannot reſolve on doing any violence to himſelf, and to ſacrifice any preſent fleeting pleaſure to any future one, though infi-

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nitely greater. He will rather be no Chriſtian, than buy its advantages at ſo dear a rate. He rejects the Chriſtian doctrine, not becauſe he is rationally convinced of its falſhood, but becauſe it is in oppoſition to his predominant paſſions. He cannot fulfil the commands of the Goſpel without renouncing his darling luſts; and accordingly, without farther examination, he ſays with the Jews, "This is an hard ſaying, who can hear it?" And, in fact, is a man addicted to avarice; how hard muſt the doctrine appear to him which pronounces a bleſſing on the poor; which denounces a woe on the rich, who place their confidence in uncertain riches; which forbids us with anxious perturbation to lay up treaſures on earth; which enjoins us to be compaſſionate, charitable, and bountiful, and not to be weary in doing good; which requires of us, on certain occaſions, to relinquiſh all that we have, for following Chriſt, and for being true to truth and virtue!

virtue! Let a man be governed by pride; how contemptible muſt the doctrine appear in his eyes, which requires of us not to ſeek the empty praiſe of mortals, not the deceitful favour of the great of this world; but the favour and approbation of God, and to make his glory the ultimate aim of all our actions; that we prefer one another in honour, and perform the moſt generous deeds, ſuch as might acquire us the higheſt renown, in ſecreſy and ſilence; a doctrine which holds out the greateſt rewards to meekneſs, and threatens him that exalts himſelf with being abaſed; a doctrine, in fine, which expoſes at times its confeſſors and followers to the ſcorn and contempt of the world! Do anger and aſperity prevail in a man; how extraordinary, how hard muſt theſe injunctions of Chriſtianity appear to him: "Love your enemies; bleſs them that curſe you; do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which deſpitefully uſe you and perſecute you: recompenſe

penſe to no man evil for evil: avenge not yourſelves: let all bitterneſs, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil-ſpeaking, be put away from you, with all malice: be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Chriſt's ſake hath forgiven you!" How contrary are theſe precepts to the temper and maxims of the irritable and revengeful! Is a man the ſlave of ſenſual pleaſures; how will he revolt againſt the doctrine which condemns all uncleanneſs; which excludes the whoremonger and adulterer from the kingdom of heaven; which commands us to obſerve moderation and order in all things, to crucify our fleſh, with its affections and luſts, to ſubdue our body, to preſerve it in ſanctification and honour, and on peril of the loſs of everlaſting happineſs to abſtain from fleſhly luſts, which war againſt the ſoul! If this then be the caſe, if the morality of Chriſt and his apoſtles be ſo holy and pure; how

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can it be otherwiſe, but that the man who follows after ſin, and will not let it go, muſt be averſe to the Goſpel which condemns and puniſhes him, and that he ſhould take refuge in unbelief, to calm his mind as well as he can, and to blunt the ſting of his conſcience. Therefore, our Saviour ſays, "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be reproved." He ſhuns it, becauſe it detects his unrighteouſneſs and folly, becauſe it brings him to the knowledge of his dangerous and wretched condition, becauſe it excites in him perturbation and anguiſh, becauſe it condemns his intemperate pleaſures, and impedes him in giving free courſe to the furious deſires of his corrupted heart. This is often the lamentable condition of the unbeliever. He deſpiſes and denies the doctrines of Chriſtianity, becauſe they are at ſtrife with his ſinful deſires, and diſturb him in his fooliſh purſuits, in his thought-

leſs ſecurity. Therefore it is ſaid, "Fooliſh men ſhall not attain unto Wiſdom, and ſinners ſhall not ſee her; for ſhe is far from pride, and men that are liars cannot remember her." And in this reſpect the apoſtle teſtifies: "If our Goſpel be hid, it is hid to them that are loſt; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, leſt the light of the glorious goſpel of Chriſt, who is the image of God, ſhould ſhine unto them."

But if this be the caſe, as none can deny, as the writings and the conduct of the ſcorners and enemies of the Chriſtian doctrine know, if theſe be the principal ſources of unbelief, if it be, in moſt inſtances, only the baſe progeny of ignorance, error, pride, and a corrupted heart, what concluſion are we to draw? Can any thing good, any thing that merits eſteem and approbation, proceed from ſuch impure and peſtiferous ſources? Muſt not unbelief itſelf be

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a great, a dreadful evil, ſince it is engendered and nouriſhed by darkneſs and vice? Muſt it not be criminal in the higheſt degree, ſince it ariſes from the corrupteſt paſſions, from a predominant affection for ſin? What then ſhould we take more to heart than the exhortation of the apoſtle: "Take heed, brethren, leſt there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God?" Yes, we will reſolutely combat this foe to our virtue, our comfort, and our hopes; we will manfully reſiſt its temptations and attacks. We will thus endeavour to prevent this evil, which daily, alas! gains ground, from ſhedding its baneful effects on us. We muſt make it our daily, our moſt delightful employment, to ſearch the Scriptures with attention and earneſtneſs, form to ourſelves plain and juſt ideas of their important and ſublime contents, and ſtrengthen ourſelves thereby in the conviction of their celeſtial origin. We will carefully uſe the excellent means the

Divine Providence has granted us to this end; and conſtantly reflect, that ignorance and error, that a ſuperficial and ſcanty knowledge of religion, is far leſs excuſable in our days, now that the light of truth ſo clearly ſhines, than ever it was before. Herein we will ſtudy meekneſs and modeſty, frequently remind ourſelves of our natural weakneſs, and the imperfection of our preſent ſtate; and never forget that here we walk by faith, and not by ſight, and that the thoughts and ways of God are as far exalted above our thoughts and ways, as the heaven is higher than the earth. Above all things, we will open our hearts to the ſalutary influence of the Chriſtian doctrine, readily follow its wiſe and beautiful precepts, fight with every luſt and propenſity that is in us, and may render the truth either hateful or unpleaſant, and with indefatigable induſtry ſtrive at our amendment. Thus ſhall we hold the faith and a good conſcience. Thus will the Goſpel be to us

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a divine power and a divine wiſdom. Thus ſhall we learn to underſtand the excellency of the doctrine of our Redeemer from our own experience; and in the knowledge and practice of it, find all that can enlighten and ſanctify, comfort and rejoice our hearts. Inſtead of feeling-out our way in darkneſs with the unbeliever, in reference to the moſt important and neceſſary truths, we ſhall walk in the light of the Lord. Inſtead of living, like him, between hope and fear, and bearing about with us a guilty conſcience, we ſhall be at peace with God, and acquire a permanent tranquillity of mind. Inſtead of acting by blind impulſes, by unruly deſires, or uncertain principles and fluctuating cuſtoms, we ſhall find in Chriſt the moſt excellent guide to a holy life, to a conduct in harmony with itſelf, and the moſt powerful ſupport in the diſcharge of our duties. Inſtead of ſeeing futurity approach us with cruel doubt, we ſhall build our hopes on an immovable rock; and

death and the grave, judgement and eternity, will have no terrors for us. O divine, O glorious faith, what advantages doſt thou not procure us! We will ſecure thee with all diligence as the moſt precious gift of God to man. Thy inſtruction, thy comfort, thy ſaving power, ſhall lead us to truth, to virtue, and to bliſs. To thee will we adhere in proſperity and in misfortune, in life and in death, and then no harm can happen unto us.

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STRICTURES

ON

SOME PREJUDICES

AGAINST

CHRISTIANITY.

Bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me. Matthew xi. 6.

STRICTURES

ON

SOME PREJUDICES

AGAINST

CHRISTIANITY.

PREJUDICES have been in all periods of time the moſt copious ſources of unbelief, and are ſo ſtill. They deprive men, not only of the deſire, but likewiſe of the capacity for the impartial and ſedate examination of truth. They render it hateful to them, or at leaſt indifferent and contemptible; and when theſe prejudices are flattering to ſenſual pleaſures, when they fall in with the ſordid and baſe propenſities

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of the heart, they ſoon become predominant principles, againſt which the ſtrongeſt demonſtrations can little or nothing avail. In this place, however, we underſtand by prejudices, ſuch judgments as a man forms, of the proper nature and frame of a matter, barely from certain outward circumſtances and accidental effects of it, and fixes its value thereby without inveſtigating the matter itſelf in its eſſential properties. Were they not ſuch prejudices as theſe which formerly hindered the Jews from acknowledging Jeſus for a teacher ſent from God, and from adopting his doctrine? Inſtead of proving the merits of his doctrine, inſtead of weighing attentively his excellent character, his beneficent and holy life, his generous and exalted actions, and thence drawing a rational concluſion of his heavenly miſſion, they adhere to ſome outward circumſtances of his perſon and fortunes; and think to have ſufficient cauſe for rejecting him, becauſe theſe circumſtances

cumſtances do not accord with their preconceived opinions. One while it was his want of a regular and learned education; at another, the mean and obſcure condition of his parents and relations; then, his frequent abode at Nazareth and in Galilee; then, his generous concern for the ſalvation of publicans and ſinners, which muſt furniſh a pretext to their unbelief. Some were offended at his perſonal poverty and meanneſs; others objected to him becauſe they were acquainted with his pedigree, ſince, according to their idle notions, no man was to know whence Chriſt ſhould be deſcended; others again allowed themſelves to be ſeduced by their reverence for the Scribes and Phariſees, who treated him with contempt, to teſtify the ſame unjuſt demeanour towards him. And are they not the very ſame, or ſimilar prejudices, that ſtill prevent numbers of men from receiving Chriſtianity with full conſent, and hearkening to its commands? They cannot

not contend againſt the ſtrong and various demonſtration on which the truth of the Chriſtian religion is grounded; much leſs can they oppoſe any demonſtration as ſtrong, or ſtill ſtronger, to this: but they find, in the circumſtances of the promulgation and diſſemination of the doctrine of Chriſt, or in the conſequences this knowledge has drawn after it, and ſtill ever produces, or in other collateral cauſes, certain ſtumbling-bocks and ſtones of offence, which they hold to be of ſufficient magnitude for making them reject the doctrine itſelf, or doubt of its authenticity. But, the more general and pernicious theſe prejudices are, ſo much the more incumbent is it on us to bring them to an impartial trial; ſo much the more neceſſary is it for us, your teachers, who ſee their unreaſonableneſs, to guard you from them. Since, according to the expreſſion of Jeſus, the man is bleſſed that ſhall not be offended in him, it is our indiſpenſable duty to diſ-

place

place all obſtacles that may deprive us of this bleſſing; and this is the purport and deſign of my preſent diſcourſe. I will endeavour, by the divine aſſiſtance, to diſcomfit

Five prejudices againſt Chriſtianity. The firſt comprehends the imaginary, or actual difficulties which are to be met with in the Chriſtian doctrine, or the propoſitions delivered in the ſacred books;—the ſecond, the narrow limits aſſigned to Chriſtianity on the face of the earth;—the third, the manifold ſects into which Chriſtians are divided;—the fourth, the bloody wars, and the cruel perſecutions, to which the diſſemination and confeſſion of the Chriſtian religion has given occaſion;—and the fifth, the ſmall influence it has had on the diſpoſitions and conduct of its confeſſors.

We readily grant, that Chriſtianity compriſes various doctrines, which we cannot fully

fully comprehend, or which are attended with certain difficulties, the ſolution whereof is above our faculties. But is this, truely, a matter of wonder? Or can we on this account reject every aphoriſm, without rendering ourſelves guilty of the greateſt partiality and ſelf-contradiction? What ſcience is free from all difficulties? What truth is ſuperior to all objection? Is not our knowledge of the moſt ordinary matters, with which we have daily to do, which are continually before our eyes, extremely imperfect? Is not the eſſence of them totally latent from us? Do we not on all ſides meet with occult qualities in nature, which we cannot fathom, and which we muſt yet admit, ſince our own ſenſes, or the experience of other men, or our own reflections, deprive us of all doubt in regard to their reality? Can we comprehend how our ſoul thinks, how it moves our body, how it operates in it, how both are connected together? Nay, do we not find

in natural religion, which yet can be demonſtrated by undeniable principles of reaſon, even as great, even as indiſſoluble difficulties, as in whatever reſts on the credible teſtimony of Chriſt and his apoſtles? Or, can we more fully explain the doctrine of God, of his infinite attributes, of his operations and ways, of his providence and government, than the doctrine of the perſon of Jeſus, the conſiſtency of his character, his ſufferings and death, and of the future retribution? Should we not then contradict ourſelves, were we to believe the former, and deny the latter? Muſt we not, rather, if we would think reaſonably and impartially, draw this concluſion thence, that all theſe difficulties have not their foundation in the nature of the thing itſelf, but in the narrow limits of our underſtanding?

We allow farther, that many obſcure paſſages are to be met with in theſe books, which the reader himſelf may elucidate, if he

he be verſed in the ſtyle of them, and furniſhed with the neceſſary helps. But will this ſeem ſtrange to us, if we reflect on the antiquity and the language of theſe books; if we take into conſideration the figurative and hyperbolical texture of expreſſion which prevailed and ſtill prevails among the nations of the Eaſt; if we conſider how different their manners, their uſages, their way of life, their opinions, were from ours? Have we not, on the contrary, the greateſt cauſe to admire and to praiſe the divine providence, for finding the means of handing down to us theſe books in ſuch an intelligible ſtate as they are, at leaſt with reference to the weightieſt and moſt important of their contents? Yes; do but read the holy Scriptures with good diſpoſitions and views; read them with an earneſt and ſincere deſire of diſcovering the truth; carefully diſtinguiſh what eſſentially belongs to Religion and to Chriſtianity, from what relates to leſs important matters, to

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correllative circumſtances; what has a tendency to improve your heart and your conduct, and to confirm your hopes in futurity, from what ſerves only to gratify a barely allowable, and ſometimes an idle curioſity. Laſtly, beware of arbitrarily determining ſuch points as the holy Scriptures have left undetermined, and confound not their expreſſions with the ingenious gloſſes by which commentators have ſometimes obſcured them: ſo will the principal difficulties, which now perplex you, fall to the ground of themſelves: and you will find that the word of the Lord is a ſplendid light, in which we ſhall rejoice, and walk ſecurely, if we faithfully follow it.

The ſecond prejudice againſt Chriſtianity is conceived from the want of a univerſal promulgation of it, and the narrow limits to which it is at preſent confined. If the Chriſtian Religion, ſay the unbelievers, be a heavenly light to enlighten mankind

and conduct them on the way to happineſs, why has not its luſtre diffuſed itſelf over the face of the whole earth? Why is not the doctrine of Chriſt announced to all the nations of the world without diſtinction? Why are there ſo many millions of men who have never heard a word of Jeſus and his ſalvation, and who ſtill live in the thickeſt darkneſs of ignorance and ſuperſtition? How can this conſiſt with the goodneſs of God, whoſe mercy is over all his works? and muſt we not thence conclude, that revelation is not that for which it is given out? I anſwer: Firſt, it is not becoming for weak and ignorant men to preſcribe rules of conduct to the Sovereign Being, or to argue with him who governs the univerſe. Is he not the uncircumſcribed proprietor of heaven and earth? Does it not reſt with him to diſpoſe of his graces and gifts as is moſt agreeable to him? Shall he not do what he will with his own? Are we, whoſe underſtanding is ſo limited, in

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a capacity to ſurvey the vaſt and infinitely extenſive plan of the divine government, and to judge of the fitneſs or unfitneſs of his methods, which are for the moſt part concealed from us? Nay, can we do this, without rendering ourſelves guilty of an infringement on his majeſtic rights? Do there not exiſt, even in the kingdom of nature, the greateſt multiplicity and variety among the properties, the powers, the prerogatives, the deſtination, the lots of animate and inanimate, rational and irrational creatures? Are there not numberleſs gradations of perfection in the ſcale of things, if we aſcend in meditation from the grain of ſand to the higheſt of the archangels? Shall we therefore deny the goodneſs and wiſdom of God, becauſe we perceive ſo great a diverſity among the inhabitants of his immenſe dominion? You aſk, Why God has not cauſed the light of truth to ſhine on all nations of the globe? And I aſk you, Why God has made the beaſts

not like men, and men not like the angels? Why has he granted this man more health, more ſtrength, more underſtanding, than the other? Why has he exalted one to the higheſt dignities, to the greateſt authority, and left another to creep in the duſt of poverty and ſcorn? Why has the one received a good education, and been imbued with ſound inſtruction, while the other has been brought up in the groſſeſt ignorance, or left to himſelf? Why is one born of a civilized and free people, and another of a wild and ſlaviſh nation? Why has, conſequently, the former ſo much fewer obſtacles, and ſo much more encouragements and means to promote his ſpiritual and everlaſting welfare, than the latter? You aſk, Why God has not cauſed the light of the Goſpel to ſhine upon all mankind? and I aſk you, Why has the light of nature, which has likewiſe God for its author, and which, according to the aſſertions of the enemies to Chriſtianity, ſhines ſo bright, that

that all other means for attaining to the knowledge of God and Religion are unneceſſary and ſuperfluous, why has it hitherto actually enlightened only ſuch a ſmall portion of men, and ſecured ſo few from idolatry and ſuperſtition? Why was it not able, in four thouſand years, to exterminate idolatry? Why has natural religion, which is ſo eaſily diſcoverable, never yet been univerſally prevalent among mankind? and why has it been ſo ſpeedily and ſo much obſcured, and ſo ſunk into oblivion, that, as far as we know, it is not purely taught, or completely underſtood, in any one nation of the earth? Anſwer firſt theſe queſtions; and then, but not till then, will you have a right to require a full ſolution of all the knotty points in regard to divine revelation.

I anſwer, farther: That it is no leſs unreaſonable than ungrateful, to refuſe to accept a precious gift, or to prize it lightly,

becauſe it is not common to all. Should we not juſtly account him a fool, who ſhould repine that God had placed him in happy circumſtances, becauſe others were leſs fortunate than he? Will any man reject riches, becauſe there are perſons who are poor, and have ſcarcely the neceſſaries of life? Will the ſcholar pronounce his advantageous diſcernment and diſcoveries to be uſeleſs and erroneous, will he deſpiſe the ſciencies he knows, becauſe but few comparatively have the capacity and the opportunity for making ſuch a progreſs in knowledge as he? Or, truly, does reaſon loſe its value, becauſe there are people almoſt totally deprived of it? But would it not be as ſtupid and abſurd to deny the truth of the Goſpel, and to refuſe to receive it, becauſe the light of it does not enlighten all men without exception? Oh! let us much rather thank the Moſt High, for this unmerited gift of his free goodneſs. Let us confeſs the great advantage we poſ-

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ſeſs, and make the beſt, the moſt diligent uſe of it. Let us never venture to blame the ways of the Lord. They are always holy and right, though we are unable to diſcern the particular reaſons of them in every ſingle event.

We know indeed, and this is the laſt remark we ſhall make on this head, we know that God is no auſtere maſter, requiring to reap where he has not ſown, and to gather where he has not ſtrewed. Indeed, were we to aſſert that God dooms to eternal torment all thoſe who never knew the Goſpel; then ſhould we aſſert a thing that is evidently contradictory to his juſtice and clemency. But we find nothing in the ſacred books that can countenance ſuch a horrible idea. They teſtify throughout, that God will reward every man according to his works; that he will judge every one according to the degree of light and knowledge he had, according to the means he poſſeſſed, according to the circumſtances wherein he was

placed; that he will require much from them to whom he has committed much, but will demand only little from them to whom he has entruſted but little. They teach us, that God is no reſpecter of perſons, but that in every nation he that feareth him and worketh righteouſneſs is accepted of him. We may therefore reſt aſſured, that God, on that day, will judge the earth by the rules of the moſt perfect equity and reaſonableneſs, and that no man will have the leaſt cauſe of complaint of the unequal diſtribution of his favour and his benefits. Only upon thoſe (attend to this) who call themſelves Chriſtians, only upon thoſe, will the ſeverity of judgment hereafter be paſſed, who voluntarily ſhut their eyes againſt the light that ſhines upon them, who will not follow it, who hate it, and love darkneſs, becauſe their deeds are evil.

The variety of ſects and parties into which Chriſtians have ſplit themſelves, is a third

third prejudice againſt Chriſtianity. We acknowledge that theſe diviſions tend to the diſgrace of Chriſtians, inaſmuch as they are oppoſite to the ſpirit of the Goſpel, and are very fruitful in pernicious effects. But we cannot perceive, how this circumſtance weakens the divine authority of the Chriſtian doctrine, or how it ſhould give us ſufficient cauſe to diſregard it. For,

Firſt, If the diverſity of notions which men form of any matter, were a ſufficient argument for rejecting the truth, or not concerning themſelves about it; then muſt we believe even nothing at all, and muſt entirely ſurrender ourſelves to indifference or doubt. Have not the moſt incontrovertible doctrines of reaſon been in all ages diſputed by men who affect ſingularity, and find pleaſure in contradiction? have they not been at one time repreſented and conſidered in this manner, and then in that,

without

without their loſing any thing on that account of their reſpectability and certainty in the minds of impartial judges? Muſt we not, for example, be fooliſh to the laſt degree, to deny the being of a God, becauſe men have widely differed among one another in the notions they have formed of this glorious Being, becauſe ſome have grounded their belief of the Deity on one ſort of demonſtration, and others on another? Should we not act fooliſhly, if we were to deny the difference between what is bad and good, what is right and wrong, becauſe one man deduces this diſtinction from the will of God, another from the being and natural frame of things, and a third from the various conſequences our actions produce, and ſtate it accordingly? And what reaſonable man has ever wholly deſpiſed and rejected philoſophy, becauſe the teachers of it divided themſelves into ſo many ſects, and ſo frequently contradicted each other? Shall I not ſearch after

truth, ſhall I relinquiſh all hope of diſcovering it, becauſe numbers falſely pretend to be in poſſeſſion of it? No! but I muſt uſe ſo much the greater circumſpection, ſo much the more diligence, ſo much the more impartiality, in the inveſtigation of truth, and not reſign myſelf to reſpect for men, but to ſolid argument or real demonſtration. This is the only concluſion I can rationally draw from the diverſity of opinions that prevail among philoſophers. And ought I not to make the very ſame concluſion in reference to the various ſects that obtain among Chriſtians?

Nay, I can the more ſafely do this, as, ſecondly, theſe ſects are not nearly ſo diſcordant with each other, as the ſects of the philoſophers. All Chriſtians, whatever diſtinctive name they bear, in principals agree with each other. They all receive the ſacred writings as a divine revelation, and demonſtrate their truth, their validity, their heavenly origin, by the very ſame arguments.

They

They all revere the Divine Providence, which preſerves and governs all, which is continually attentive to mankind, which puniſhes and rewards them. They all acknowledge Jeſus Chriſt for a divine teacher, for a heavenly meſſenger, for the greateſt benefactor to mankind, for our Lord and King. They all believe that he came into the world at a ſtated time, that he led a life of conſummate virtue, that he taught a holy and excellent doctrine, that he ſuffered innocently and voluntarily, that he died, and roſe again from the dead, that after his reſurrection he was exalted to ſupreme glory and might, and that he imparted his ſpirit, by the operation of which the apoſtles were enabled powerfully to combat ſuperſtition, idolatry, and vice, and to diſſeminate truth and virtue in the world. They all acknowledge themſelves to be bound and obligated to follow the example of their Lord and Maſter, and to live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godlily. In fine,

fine, they all believe, that Chriſt will come again hereafter, and judge the world, that he will reward every one according to his works, that the obſtinate ſinner has the heavieſt puniſhment to dread, and the pious to expect an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. But if we cannot deny, that theſe are the eſſential axioms of Religion and Chriſtianity; and if it be certain, that they are adopted and maintained of all who bear the name of Chriſtians: then the diverſity in their other opinions is ſo far from juſtifying us either in doubt or unbelief, that it rather gives a new degree of credibility to thoſe axioms; ſince it is plain from thence that they muſt be founded on the ſtrongeſt and moſt convincing demonſtration, as it would not elſe be poſſible for ſo many perſons of ſuch oppoſite diſpoſitions and ways of thinking to be in perfect conſent together in ſuch a number of important articles.

If

If then, thirdly, the ſects and controverſies which have ariſen among Chriſtians, ſo far from weakening the credibility of Chriſtianity, much rather ſerve to confirm it; and though they have been the occaſion of many pernicious diſorders in the moral conduct of mankind, yet in other reſpects they have been highly advantageous to truth. The earlier the Chriſtians divided themſelves into various parties, the more diverſe theſe parties were, the more diligently did they watch each other, the more nicely did they reciprocally judge, in regard to doctrine and behaviour; ſo much the leſs liable were the ſacred books in which the Chriſtian maxims are contained, and the hiſtory whereon they reſt, to be falſified; and ſo much the more certain may we be that the writings of the Evangeliſts and Apoſtles are come down to us without undergoing any material alterations. Probably we ſhould ſtill have had a very obſcure, unſettled, and incomplete knowledge

ledge of many truths of Philoſophy as well as of Chriſtianity, had not the controverſies that have ariſen about them given birth to a cloſer inveſtigation and a more exact diſcuſſion of them. Nay, but for this, would indeed the truth of the Chriſtian Religion in general, and the rationality of its principal axioms in particular, have been ſo often and ſtrictly proved, and placed in ſo clear a light, as has actually been the caſe?

Laſtly, I remark, that not Chriſtianity itſelf, but the want of the Chriſtian ſpirit, has been the cauſe of the diviſions that prevail in the Chriſtian world. Theſe diviſions would for the moſt part ceaſe, they would ſoon give place to peace, to unanimity and brotherly love, if men took greater pains to practiſe real Chriſtianity, if they were more diligent to obſerve its injunctions, if they hearkened more to the

the voice of Jeſus and his Apoſtles, than to the voice of their paſſions. But ſhould we not act unjuſtly in charging on Chriſtianity the faults that proceed from human corruption, and are in ſuch viſible contradiction to it?

This leads us to the examination of the fourth prejudice againſt the Chriſtian Religion. It relates to the bloody wars and the cruel perſecutions, to which the confeſſion and diſſemination of it have furniſhed occaſion. Theſe wars, theſe perſecutions, are aſſuredly the ſad monuments of human injuſtice and cruelty. They are undeniable evidences, that error and vice have frequently triumphed over truth and virtue; but they give us no right on their account to reproach the Chriſtian diſpenſation, or to deny its celeſtial origin. For,

Firſt, It is certain, that the Chriſtian doctrine inculcates nothing but love, docility,

lity, gentleneſs and concord; and all diſpoſitions and actions that are in oppoſition to theſe virtues, it expreſſly condemns. It is certain, that Chriſt and his Apoſtles not only moſt ſtrictly enjoin theſe virtues on all occaſions, and make them the baſis of the Chriſtian Religion, but that they exemplified them in a high degree of perfection, and never either ſpoke or tranſacted any thing that was in the ſlighteſt reſpect inconſiſtent with them. It is certain, in fine, that the primitive Chriſtians diſtinguiſhed themſelves in the moſt conſpicuous manner from all the reſt of mankind by the diſplay of theſe virtues, and thus acquired the reverence of their moſt inveterate enemies. Have Chriſtians, in ſucceeding periods, at times relaxed from theſe noble principles? have they frequently been more obedient to their paſſions than to the precepts of their Lord and Maſter? Will any thing more come of it, than that, in ſuch caſes, their behaviour was at variance with their

knowledge, and that, in ſo far as they acted thus, they rendered themſelves unworthy of the Chriſtian name? Are not the beſt eſtabliſhments, the moſt ſalutary inſtitutions, ſubject to abuſe? and ſhould we not act very unreaſonably in rejecting them on that account, and pronouncing them bad and pernicious? Has not the erection of civil ſociety, which is yet ſo adapted to the nature and deſtination of man, and procures him ſo many advantages and comforts, been attended with various kinds of fraud, of oppreſſion and violence, which probably would never have exiſted if we had lived in an abſolute independence on each other, and had preferred deſarts and caves to cities and towns? Have not the arts and ſciences, which ſo evidently confer benefit and dignity on mankind, which are in many reſpects ſo indiſpenſable to us, and which are ſuch abundant ſources of the moſt generous pleaſures, furniſh us with ſuch adequate means to the formation

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of our mind and our heart; have they not given riſe to luſts and paſſions that are not to be met with among rude and unpoliſhed nations? Shall we therefore deſpiſe ſocial life, contemn the arts and ſciences, and hold the inventors and promoters of them for enemies to the human race? Or ſhall we not confeſs and uſe the great and manifeſt advantages they bring us, becauſe they are not always uſed as they might and ſhould be? But would it not be to judge and to act juſt as perverſely, were we to deſpiſe and not uſe the Chriſtian doctrine, which is not only deſigned, but is likewiſe perfectly adapted, to render human ſociety a ſociety of friends and brethren, and their dwellings the dwellings of harmony and peace, becauſe all its profeſſors have not the amiable and peaceable diſpoſitions, which, as ſuch, they may and ſhould poſſeſs? Certainly, as unjuſt as it would be to accuſe a father or a teacher who applied all his endeavours to inſpire into his children or his ſcholars,

both by precept and example, the tendereſt and moſt conſtant affection for each other, with being the inſtigator of the diſputes that ſhould afterwards ariſe among them; ſo unjuſt would it be to impute the wars and violences that have ariſen among Chriſtians to the excellent doctrine they profeſs, or to pronounce it the leſs good, and leſs worthy of acceptation, on account of them.

The fact, however, is, that the generality of the wars and cruelties, that have been attributed to religious zeal, took their riſe from very different ſources. Religion was, in moſt of them, no more than a pretext made ſubſervient to the proſecution of the ambitious ſtratagems of the lords of the earth, or to the gratification of their perſonal hatred and revenge, or to the aſſuaging of their inſatiable avidity for ſilver and gold; and theſe ſordid paſſions would have been the ſame, and pro-

bably have had worſe conſequences, if they had failed of that pretext.

Laſtly, we muſt well obſerve, that even the moſt unrighteous wars, that have been carried on among Chriſtians, have been far leſs cruel and deſtructive than thoſe which were formerly proſecuted between the Heathen nations; and that the effects of animoſity and rancour have not been by far ſo general and horrible among the former as the latter. Every one, acquainted with antient and modern hiſtory, and that compares them impartially together, cannot deny what is here advanced; but muſt acknowledge, that we are more indebted to the Chriſtian Religion, even in this reſpect, than is commonly imagined.

We come now to the fifth and laſt prejudice againſt Chriſtianity. It is built on the ſmall influence this Religion has had on the diſpoſitions and conduct of its profeſ-

ſors. Men ſee, that many who name the name of Chriſt, are no better, not more virtuous, not more holy, than they who have only the light of Reaſon for their guide, and thence form a concluſion diſadvantageous to the excellency and divine origin of the Chriſtian Religion. We muſt confeſs, that this charge is not without foundation; it is a truth which daily experience but too much confirms; a truth which in all equity ought to ſhame and confound us, which ſhould rouſe us from the perilous ſleep of ſin, from our ſpiritual ſlumbers, and incite us to the zealous diſcharge of our duties. But where falls the diſgrace ariſing from this truth? Where juſtly lies the reproach? On Chriſtianity, or on its unworthy profeſſors? Certainly on theſe, and not on that. No! we need not be aſhamed of the Goſpel of Chriſt; it is and remains a power of God unto ſalvation. But Chriſt muſt be aſhamed of us, who declare ourſelves his diſciples, without fol-

following his example, and being ſo minded as he alſo was. Or, is not the Chriſtian Religion the holieſt Religion that ever was delivered to mankind? Is there one vice, one ſin, one failing, that it does not expreſſly condemn, which it does not ſeverely forbid us? Is there a virtue, a good diſpoſition, which it does not recommend, which it does not forcibly preſs and inculcate upon us? Have not all its doctrines, all its commands, all its promiſes and threats, our improvement and ſanctification evidently in view? Are they not all adapted in their very nature to make us the moſt juſt, the moſt affectionate, the moſt beneficent, the moſt generous of men? Is it poſſible for motives to goodneſs to be ſtronger than thoſe the Goſpel contains? Should we then reject and deſpiſe a doctrine thus calculated, becauſe many who pretend to embrace it ſlight altogether the uſe of it, or oppoſe its wholeſome influence? Then muſt we likewiſe pronounce Na-

tural Religion, and all it teaches us of God, of his providence, and of a future retribution, to be errors, ſince but few live conformably to it. Or can we with any ſhow of reaſon require, that the Goſpel ſhould act with an irreſiſtible ſway on its confeſſors, and convert and heal them without their concurrence, nay againſt their will? Where has Chriſt, where have his Apoſtles, given us the leaſt room for ſo abſurd an expectation? Should we be ſtill free agents, ſhould we ſtill be capable of reward or puniſhment, if it did not depend on our choice either to obſerve or to neglect the precepts of Chriſtianity? And is that then in fault, if many, if the majority, prefer the latter courſe?

Yet this is not all. We have undeniable experiences of the benefit of Chriſtianity before us. Did it not produce the moſt ſurpriſing and ſalutary reformation, the moſt excellent effects among mankind

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in the firſt periods after its promulgation? Could not a Paul make his appeal to the Corinthians, who had been ſunk in the loweſt depths of corruption: "Be not deceived; neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abuſers of themſelves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, ſhall inherit the kingdom of God. And ſuch were ſome of you: but ye are waſhed, but ye are ſanctified, but ye are juſtified, in the name of the Lord Jeſus, and by the ſpirit of our God?" Could not a Tertullian, in his Apology for the Chriſtians, ſay with the greateſt boldneſs to the Roman governors: "All your priſons are full of malefactors; but all theſe malefactors are Heathens?" Was not Pliny obliged to give the honourable teſtimony in favour of the Chriſtians whom he was ordered to perſecute, that he could diſcover no manner of harm in them, but that they had bound themſelves by a ſolemn

oath

oath to avoid all wickedneſs and vice? Did not an apoſtate and inimical Julian find himſelf neceſſitated to propoſe the Chriſtians as patterns of love, compaſſion, liberality, and temperance, to the Heathen Prieſts, for filling them with ſhame, and provoking them to emulation? Did the Goſpel then formerly ſo evidently manifeſt its power; then certainly it is not to be imputed to it, but to the greater reſiſtance and pertinacity of mankind, whenever the like does not happen in as high a degree and as remarkable a manner. In the mean time, we ſhould be unjuſt and ungrateful to deny or not to confeſs the good effects the Chriſtian doctrine is ſtill producing from day to day. Without it, there is no doubt but the corruption of manners would be far greater, real virtue and piety would be much more rare among us, than they actually are. This is ſufficiently confirmed both by hiſtory and experience. Flagitious crimes and vices are indiſputably not ſo

numerous and common by far among Chriſtians, as among the Heathen and Mohammedan nations. The morals of the former have, upon the whole, greatly and remarkably the advantage over the morals of the latter. Juſtice, philanthrophy, liberality, placibility, fidelity, and other ſocial virtues, are much better underſtood, and more commonly practiſed, among us than among them; and the number of pious Chriſtians very far exceeds the number of pious unbelievers.

Now, judge for yourſelves, whether the prejudices againſt Chriſtianity, which we have been proving and combating, are of ſuch a nature as to juſtify us in deſpiſing or rejecting it? You find, as I confidently hope, the contrary; you are convinced that theſe prejudices are unfounded. Then let theſe things ſtrengthen your faith in Jeſus and his Goſpel. Let them ſecure you from all offence at the perſon of our Redeemer and his doctrine, and inſpire you with

with the profoundeſt veneration for them. But let them alſo move you to the firm reſolution to ſhew forth their praiſe, not only with your lips, but in your lives; by giving up yourſelves to the ſervice of God, and by walking before him in holineſs and righteouſneſs all your days; by living conſiſtently with the doctrines of Jeſus, in obedience to all his commands. So will you evince, by your conduct, the excellency of Chriſtianity; you will fill its foes with ſhame, and refute their objections by your life.

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STRICTURES

ON

SOME PREJUDICES

AGAINST

THE CHRISTIAN MORALITY.

Bleſſed is he whoſoever ſhall not be offended in me. Matthew xi. 6.

STRICTURES

ON

SOME PREJUDICES

AGAINST

THE CHRISTIAN MORALITY.

THE human underſtanding, corrupted by ſin, is inexhauſtible, as it were, in objections and doubts, in ſubterfuges and evaſions, when the ſordid deſires of the heart are attacked, or any matter is agitated for its improvement. The ſlighteſt appearance, a bare poſſibility, will then be taken as a ſufficient ſubſtitute for demonſtration, and outweigh the moſt undeniable principles, and the ſoundeſt concluſions.

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Of this, the behaviour of the ſcorners and enemies of Religion furniſh us with a deplorable example. Can they take no juſt offence at the various and ſolid arguments on which the truth and divinity of Religion reſt; they ſeek, at leaſt, to weaken by all means the reverence that is due to it, by bringing objections, of greater or leſs apparent validity, that they may quiet themſelves in their unbelief. Have they neither inclination nor capacity for examining the Chriſtian doctrine in all its parts with due impartiality and attention, and for paſſing a judgment upon it founded on knowledge; they then content themſelves with adopting certain general prejudices againſt it, which relate not ſo much to its eſſential contexture and its intrinſic value, as to ſome of its outward circumſtances and accidental effects.

We lately brought to the teſt, and combated, various prejudices of this nature.

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We ſhewed you, that neither the pretended nor the real difficulties in the ſubject-matter of Chriſtianity, nor the narrow limits to which it is confined on the globe of the earth, nor the diverſity of ſects into which Chriſtians have divided, nor the wars and perſecutions to which the Chriſtian Religion has given occaſion or pretext, nor the little influence it has on the diſpoſitions and the behaviour of its confeſſors, are ſufficient to excuſe us in contemning or rejecting it; and that all theſe charges are of ſuch a nature as to make no unfavourable impreſſion of it on a ſincere and impartial reverer of truth. At preſent, by the divine aſſiſtance and bleſſing, we will weigh three other prejudices againſt Chriſtianity, which are the more pernicious, as they relate to the practical part of it, or the evangelical morality. It is objected, that, at bottom, it is nothing elſe but the morality of Reaſon, and has little or no advantage over it; that it is utterly too auſtere, and in practice too

difficult, nay, impoſſible; that it depreſſes the ſpirit of man, and makes him languid and heartleſs. A cloſer inſpection of theſe objections will convince you, as I confidently hope, of their abſolute want of foundation, and ſet the excellency of the doctrine of Jeſus and his Apoſtles in a conſpicuous light.

Firſt, I ſay, it is objected, That it is no more than the morality of Reaſon, and has no advantage, or but little, over it: from whence this concluſion is drawn, That mankind had no need of this peculiar revelation, for learning their duties and the reaſons on which they are founded. An objection which is advanced, indeed, with the greateſt effrontery, by the teachers of unbelief, and adorned with all poſſible art, and yet proceeds only from ignorance, or from a criminal partiality, as the following remarks will clearly evince.

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In the firſt place, we readily allow, that all the precepts of the Goſpel are reaſonable in the higheſt degree; that they are all in full agreement with our nature and the relations in which we ſtand towards God and towards mankind, towards the preſent and the future world. We allow farther, that a Chriſtian Philoſopher is able to ſhew the juſtice, the equity, the beauty of theſe precepts, by the arguments of Reaſon alone, and to ſet them beyond all manner of doubt. But, does it therefore follow, that a Heathen Philoſopher alſo, or that any reaſonable and reflecting man, to whom the knowledge and practice of his duties is as important as to the Philoſopher, is able to do this? Does it follow, that we ſhould ever have been able to proceed ſo far in this reſpect, if the light of the Goſpel had not ſhone upon us, and conducted us on the way of truth? Is there not a great difference between the Reaſon which is ſtrengthened and improved by a Divine Re-

velation, and the Reaſon that is left to itſelf, and is deſtitute of theſe excellent helps? We are early in life inſtructed in the doctrine of Chriſtianity: we are hence ſecured from many groſs and hurtful errors which were formerly prevalent among the Heatheniſh nations, and to the refutation and dereliction whereof it required no ſmall degree of reflection and ſtrength of mind. We get this at a period, when we ourſelves are not in a ſituation to launch out into copious reſearches and inveſtigations, for diſtinguiſhing the true from the falſe, for acquiring juſt conceptions of the nature of God and man, of our origin and our diſtination; we learn to know the relation wherein we ſtand towards God, our Creator and Lord, our Father and Benefactor; we are led to the belief of a wiſe and righteous Providence, which extends over all, which governs all, and which hereafter will require an account of the behaviour of men. How then can it otherwiſe be, than that, enriched with theſe ideas and knowledges, we ſhould think

think much more juſtly in morals, and advance much farther, than the Heathen Sages, who were ignorant in all theſe reſpects, or uncertain and doubtful, or even connected them with the groſſeſt errors? But ſhould we not be very partial, ſhould we not render ourſelves guilty of the baſeſt ingratitude, in aſcribing theſe advantages to our own ingenuity, in not attributing them to the light of Divine Revelation? Should we not contradict ourſelves in deſpiſing the Goſpel, or in holding it for a leſs precious preſent of divine compaſſion, becauſe, when once made known to us, we are of neceſſity forced to confeſs that it is reaſonable, and wholeſome, and good?

This is not all. Hiſtory inconteſtably informs us, that the morality of the Heathen Philoſophers was very imperfect in many reſpects, as we lately more largely evinced, on another occaſion. Its precepts were very defective. They condemned all vices and

faults without exception; they did not enjoin all the virtues as indiſpenſably neceſſary without diſtinction; and the filial fear of God, love towards God, confidence in God, gratitude for his benefits, contentedneſs with all his diſpenſations, a zealous endeavour at rendering ourſelves agreeable to him, and, by integrity and holineſs, to be partakers of a divine nature, a general philanthropy, not confined to any particular nation, true humility, forgiveneſs of injuries, heavenly-mindedneſs, purity of heart, and faith, are duties which were almoſt totally unknown to them, of which we ſeldom or never hear them ſpeak. Again, their precepts were not calculated for the moral ſtate in which men are at preſent. Either they were too complying, and contented themſelves with a conduct free from groſs delinquencies, from manifeſt and flagrant enormities, and not at variance with the laws of the land; or they were too ſevere, and required a degree of perfection, or rather

ther of difference towards the goods of this life, beyond what the nature of man is capable of on earth. Either they gave him the unhappy permiſſion to ſeek his ſovereign good in ſenſual pleaſures, and in an attachment to his luſts; or they abſolutely required him to eradicate all his paſſions, and attain to an inſenſibility, a perfect apathy, both towards himſelf and others. Their beſt maxims, moreover, were ſo framed, that they could ſcarcely make any impreſſion on the majority of mankind, and had very little efficacy to move them to virtue. As their knowledge of God, of his attributes, of his providence, of the creation of the world, of our entire dependence on the Supreme Exiſtence, and of our behaviour towards him, was very erroneous and obſcure; ſo neither could they deduce their morality from theſe truths, which yet are the only ſolid foundation on which morality can be built. The Heatheniſh Religion, which was abſolutely not moral, but

conſiſted merely in rites and ſacrifices, was of more detriment than utility to morals. Theſe had nothing in common with the former. They were rather conſidered as a ſcience, which belonged only to the ſchools of the ſages. The Moraliſts therefore could not give their precepts the ſanction of laws; they could not deliver them as the holy and inviolable commands of the great Ruler of heaven and earth; they could repreſent them no otherwiſe than as naturally reaſonable and fitting. But who knows not how ill-adapted ſuch repreſentations are to move the majority of mankind, and how few of them are obſervant or acute, or even candid enough, to perceive the juſtice and force of them, with ſuch clearneſs and certainty, as to be moved by their means to make an alteration in their temper and behaviour? How much, in ſhort, muſt the morality of the Heathen Philoſophers have loſt, by their being unacquainted with the important doctrines of the immortality of

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the ſoul, and of the life to come; by their being forced to put up with bare ſuppoſitions and gueſſes about it, and never attaining to complete aſſurance! What can enable a man to gain a victory over the moſt flattering temptations to ſin; what can induce him to remain firm to his duties, in the greateſt and moſt imminent dangers; what can make him reſolute in ſacrificing all that he elſe moſt eſteems and loves, even his honour and his reputation with poſterity not excepted, to integrity and virtue, unleſs his courage be rouzed by the proſpect of a better world, and he himſelf, as it were, lifted above all that is temporal and viſible? But are not all theſe great, are they not eſſential defects in the morality of unaſſiſted Reaſon? And ſhall the morality of the Goſpel be allowed no advantages over it? How happily, how perfectly, does it ſupply all theſe defects! Conſiſtency, juſtice, preciſion, perſpicuity, ſimplicity, dignity, energy, life, are what no man can

detract

detract from it, who conſiders it with an inquiſitive, a ſincere and virtuous mind. It warns us from all vice; it incites us to every virtue; it compriſes all our duties; it propounds them in ſuch a manner, that every one may eaſily comprehend and appropriate them; it ſupports them all on the moſt powerful motives; it gives them all the ſanction of divine commands. It is no leſs adapted to improve our heart than to regulate as it ought our outward deportment. It interdicts us no innocent pleaſures; but it forbids us all immoderate enjoyment of them, and the ſenſuality that ariſes from it. It will not have us inſenſible towards the evils and misfortunes of life; but it gives us the moſt powerful inducements to bear them with patience, and thence to become wiſer and better. It treats us, in this reſpect, as ſinners, who are in want of grace, forgiveneſs, and aſſiſtance, and is lenient towards our unavoidable infirmities. It aſſures us that

God will graciouſly regard our ſincere and perſevering endeavours to pleaſe him, and to perfect our holineſs, though we ſhould not attain to perfection. It teaches us to conſider this life as a ſtate of diſcipline, of exerciſe, and trial, and turns our principal attention to the future. It inſtructs us ſatisfactorily of what we have, when this life is ended, to hope or to fear; of the account we are hereafter to give of our conduct, and of the eternal retribution we have to expect; and thus adds a divine efficacy to all its injunctions, ſufficient to conquer our corruption, and to make us new creatures. But, if the morality of the Goſpel has ſo many great advantages, how much does the revelation of it tend to the glorification of the wiſdom and goodneſs of God; and how ungrateful muſt we be if we find fault with the means he has thought fit to uſe in this reſpect, or to hold them for unneceſſary and ſuperfluous!

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The ſecond prejudice againſt the evangelical morality is, that it is abſolutely too ſevere, and unreducible to practice. It ſpares indeed no vice, no ſordid affection, no ſiniſter deſign. It is not to be ſatisfied with the ſemblance of virtue and the maſk of devotion. It requires improvement of heart, regularity of deſire; it inſpires us with a tranſcendent and ever-effective love to every thing true, and juſt, and good, to whatever is eſtimable and amiable; and thereby elevates us to the honour and the happineſs of ever increaſing in likeneſs to God, and to his Son, our Saviour, of ever becoming more and more capable of bliſs in the future world. It requires of us, in this deſign, that we ſhould deny all ungodlineſs and worldly luſts, and live ſoberly, righteouſly, and godlily in this preſent world. In this view, it enjoins us to crucify the fleſh, with its affections and luſts, to follow after ſanctification and virtue with indefatigable ardour, and to perfect our holineſs

lineſs in the fear of the Lord. In this view it requires us to deny ourſelves, and to be followers of Jeſus; to be ready to forego all things, whatever is moſt dear and delightful to us on earth, nay, our life itſelf, for the ſake of truth and the bleſſing of God; to look, not at the things which are ſeen, but at the things which are not ſeen; to ſeek thoſe things which are above. Theſe and the like requiſites certainly ſeem ſevere. The corrupted human heart revolts againſt them, and often takes up the language of the unbelieving Jews: "This is an hard ſaying; who can hear it?" To this we reply:

Firſt: This objection concerns in a great meaſure the morality of Reaſon, no leſs than that of Chriſtianity; and conſequently cannot in the ſmalleſt degree derogate from the importance and excellency of the latter. For the morality of Reaſon, as well as the other, preſcribes us many duties which we cannot fulfill without much

pains and labour, without ſtruggles and conflicts, ſince they oppoſe the violent impulſes of ſenſe, our ſordid habits, and the licentious maxims, on which the conduct of the multitude is framed, and hinder us at times from acquiring and promoting what we term our fortunes. They both equally require of us, that we govern ourſelves, ſet bounds to our deſires, and moderate our paſſions; that we, on many occaſions, ſacrifice our repoſe and our pleaſure, however harmleſs they otherwiſe may be, to our duty, and our particular advantage to the public good; that we look not barely at the preſent, but alſo at the future; that we think and act, not ſolely as ſenſual, but as rational and immortal creatures; that we continually ſtrive after a higher degree of perfection; that we be firm and immoveable in the love and practice of integrity and virtue, and not ſuffer ourſelves to be diſmayed or allured from our courſe by threats or promiſes. On

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theſe general principles of reaſon, reſt all, even the hardeſt precepts of the Goſpel; and we cannot reject theſe, without at the ſame time renouncing thoſe.

In the ſecond place, the purity and holineſs of the Chriſtian morality is ſo far from diminiſhing its dignity, that it confirms it the more. Could we regard a doctrine that flattered the ſenſual luſts of men, or contented itſelf with an inferior degree of piety and virtue, as any extraordinary matter? How can we then, without contradicting ourſelves, make that an objection to the evangelical morality, which ſo plainly bears witneſs to its truth and its divine deſcent? Should we not, on the contrary, for this very reaſon, account it excellent, acceptable, and divine, becauſe it is indulgent to no fault, no ſin, no vice; becauſe all its precepts are ſo pure, ſo holy; becauſe they are all ſo adapted to improve and to elevate our very nature, to inſpire

us with the moſt juſt, the moſt beneficent, the nobleſt diſpoſitions, and to make us conſtantly advance on the ſcale of perfection?

Thirdly: We need but examine the ſcope of the evangelical morality; we need but remember the vocation of man; for immediately perceiving that its precepts are not too ſevere. We ſhall find, that they contain nothing arbitrary in them, but ſtand in the cloſeſt connexion with our preſent and future condition. Only reflect, how ſtrong our attachment to ſenſuality, how great our moral corruption is, how various and captivating the temptations to evil, and how eaſily we are charmed into the ſnare, if we do not continually watch over ourſelves, if we do not ſuppreſs the firſt irregular deſires, if we allow ourſelves in the leaſt inattention, or are ſlothful in the practice of virtue and piety; at the ſame time conſider, that we are only ſtrangers and pilgrims on the

the earth; that we have no abiding city here, but muſt ſeek it in futurity; that we find ourſelves at preſent in a ſtate of diſcipline and exerciſe; that our everlaſting lot depends on the frame of our preſent behaviour; that we are called to a happineſs which is to conſiſt in the pureſt pleaſures, in the nobleſt occupations; and that we ſhall therefore be abſolutely incapable of this felicity, if we do not now acquire a predominant diſpoſition to all goodneſs, and a certain aptitude in the practice of it; if we do not habituate ourſelves at preſent to elevate ourſelves in thought and deſire above viſible objects, and employ ourſelves in ſpiritual and heavenly things. Weigh all this, I ſay, and you will plainly perceive, that the precepts of the Goſpel are exactly proportioned to our circumſtances and wants; nay, you will be obliged to own, that they would be inſufficient to ſubdue our corruption, and to prepare ſuch creatures as we

are for that ſtate of perfection and bliſs, if they were leſs pure, or leſs holy; if they did not inculcate upon us vigilance and induſtry in our conduct, the combating our luſts, ſelf-denial, and a contempt for the world, heavenly-mindedneſs, and an unremited endeavour to pleaſe God, and to have fellowſhip with him, the moſt pure and moſt holy Being, as the eſſential and neceſſary duties of Chriſtianity.

As to what, in the fourth place, particularly relates to perſecutions for the ſake of righteouſneſs and truth; we readily allow, that a great vigour of mind, and a high degree of virtue, are requiſite for ſacrificing one's honour, his goods, nay his life itſelf, for the cauſe of God and Religion, to take upon him the croſs of Chriſt with fortitude and joy, and to follow him even in death. But is it not juſt, is it not reaſonable for him ſo to do? To truth and integrity

tegrity can we ever make too coſtly offerings? Can we ever do too much for Chriſt, our Saviour, and Lord? Is it to be called a loſs, if we ſacrifice any thing from love and obedience towards God, who holds in his hands whatever felicity we can hope to enjoy? What are all the ſufferings of this preſent time, compared to the eternal and exceeding weight of glory prepared for the faithful followers of our Redeemer, to thoſe who fight and conquer in his cauſe? Or is it impoſſible to give ſuch proofs of attachment? Have not many of the firſt Chriſtians demonſtrated the contrary by their example? Have they not far preferred the unfading crown of life, to all the advantages, all the goods and pleaſures of the world? Did they not remain conſtant in the midſt of afflictions and perſecutions? How rarely does God, in his mercy, who knows our weakneſs, allow us to fall into ſuch dangerous trials! And how powerful is the aſſiſtance, how extraordinary the

comfort, with which he ſupports his ſincere and conſtant worſhipers, when he requires of them ſuch demonſtrations of integrity and faith!

Laſtly, we cannot diſcover in general either an internal or an external impoſſibility of living up to the precepts of the Goſpel, as theſe precepts do not contradict one another, but are all in the moſt beautiful harmony, and tend to the very ſame object; as they are all founded on the nature of the caſe itſelf, and on the relationſhip in which we ſtand towards God and man; as they are all deſigned and adapted to promote and to confirm our preſent and future perfection and happineſs. They may all be conſidered as the natural and neceſſary conſequences of the love of God and of our neighbour; and no man can obſerve theſe fundamental laws of Chriſtianity, without diſcharging at once the other duties it lays upon us. As little are we able to diſcover

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an external impoſſibility of reducing the evangelical morality to practice. For, on one ſide, the motives by which it incites us to obedience are ſo various, ſo affecting, ſo forcible, that they neceſſarily muſt make the deepeſt impreſſion upon us, and help us to overcome all temptations, if we frequently ponder them with ſtedfaſt attention, and do not willingly reſiſt their ſalutary influence. Certainly, if the idea of an omniſcient, an almighty, a holy and righteous Being, who is the conſtant and incorruptible witneſs of our ſentiments and our conduct, and on whom our life and all our happineſs depends; if the love of God, who for our ſakes ſpared not his only begotten Son; if the ſight of the croſs of the dying Jeſus; if the expectation of a judgment to come; if the hope of an eternal and inexpreſſible bliſs; if all this is not capable of rendering the accompliſhment of our duties poſſible and eaſy, and of enabling us to contend with fortitude and

boldneſs againſt aſſailing troubles; then is nothing able to effect it, and our hearts muſt be utterly inſenſible or utterly corrupted. On the other ſide, God himſelf will enable us by his word both to will and to do according to his good pleaſure. He will be mighty in our weakneſs; he will never ſuffer us to be tempted above that we are able to bear; he will come to our aſſiſtance by the ways of his providence, and facilitate the work of our ſanctification to us; he will give us his ſpirit, and grant us the peculiar help of his grace, as often as we have need of it, with a faithful and diligent uſe of the ordinary means of ſalvation. Provided with theſe means, and ſupported by this help, every upright Chriſtian may boaſt with the Apoſtle, "I can do all things through Chriſt which ſtrengtheneth me. For I am perſuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor things preſent, nor things to come, nor height" [proſperity], "nor depth" [adverſity], "nor any other creature, ſhall

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be able to ſeparate us from the love of God which is in Chriſt Jeſus our Lord." But who ſees not, that this is in manifeſt contradiction to the pretended impoſſibility of living up to the precepts of the Goſpel? And this reproach is only chargeable on its authors, and not on Chriſtianity, ſince they thereby betray a ſhameful inaptitude to goodneſs, and a criminal love of ſin. At leaſt, he who has a predominant taſte for what is morally beautiful, and good, and becoming, and ſtrives after perfection, according to his vocation, will certainly never complain, that the rules put into his hands are too ſtrict and ſevere.

The third prejudice againſt Chriſtianity in general, and the evangelical morality in particular, is, that it depreſſes the ſpirit of man; that it renders him puſillanimous, fearful, and dejected; and to evidence this, they principally appeal to the commands of meekneſs, humility, of forgiveneſs, and

love towards enemies, which Chriſt and his Apoſtles have given us. To this we reply: Firſt, that this objection manifeſtly diſagrees with the whole contents of the Chriſtian Religion in general, and that in its very nature it is framed and adapted to produce the quite contrary effects. For what is it that commonly depreſſes the ſpirit of man? What is it that, for the moſt part, enfeebles the powers both of his body and his ſoul? What deprives him of deſire and courage to great and generous actions? What makes him dejected and fearful? It is either the conſciouſneſs of his tranſgreſſions, the perturbation and ſtings of his conſcience, the fear of condign puniſhment; or it is the irregular and immoderate love of ſenſual pleaſures and fleſhly luſts; or it is the want of comfort and hope in dangers; or it is a natural diſpoſition to melancholy and ſadneſs. But does not Chriſtianity, if we believe her doctrines and follow her precepts, remove all theſe impediments to vigour of

ſpirit, to real fortitude, and generous heroiſm? Does ſhe not furniſh us with the beſt weapons for combating and conquering them? She even ſhews us how we may free ourſelves from the burden of our ſins, how we may obtain the divine forgiveneſs, and be reconciled with God. She calms the conſcience of the believing Chriſtian; ſhe compoſes his heart; ſhe fills it with peace and joy in the Holy Spirit; and though the wicked flee when no man purſueth, yet the righteous, whoſe heart condemneth him not, is as bold as a lion. Again, the Chriſtian Religion interdicts us all exceſs in ſenſual pleaſure. She preſcribes us ſobriety, moderation, and abſtinence. She requires that we take more care of the ſoul than the body; that we purify and exalt our taſte; that we walk not after the fleſh, but after the ſpirit; and, like the Agoniſtics in the Grecian games, that we voluntarily abſtain from whatever may hinder us in obtaining the victory over ourſelves and over the world;

world; and thus renders us expert in the exerciſe of the moſt difficult, the moſt exalted virtues. The Chriſtian Religion informs us of a wiſe and bountiful Providence, which governs all things, which provides for every creature, which in all its diſpenſations has the nobleſt views, and which diſpoſes all events ſo that they muſt adminiſter to the advantage of them that love God; and thus renders all adverſities and tribulations tolerable and eaſy to them. She teaches us, laſtly, to conſider this life in its connection with the future; ſhe certifies us of the immortality of our ſpirit, and gives us the unfailing hope of a felicity which far exceeds all that here on earth we know of deſirable and precious; and thus puts us in a condition to deſpiſe every evil we can meet with in the world, nay, death itſelf, and to triumph over all the terrors of the grave. And ſhall a man, who affectionates the Chriſtian Religion at his heart, who believes its doctrines from conviction,

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and is obedient to its precepts, ſhall he be ſpiritleſs, fearful, and dejected? Or, can any thing ſolidly quiet us; can any thing render us undaunted, firm, and chearful, if Chriſtianity is not able to effect it?

The ſame may be advanced, in particular, of the virtues of humility, meekneſs, and placability, which the Goſpel preſcribes us. Theſe virtues are ſo far from degrading mankind, or leſſening their courage, that they eſſentially belong to true greatneſs of mind, and fit us for the nobleſt and moſt beneficent undertakings. "He that ruleth his ſpirit," ſays the wiſe king, "is mightier than he that taketh a city." And, in fact, which is nobler, to requite evil with evil, or evil with good; to revenge oneſelf on an enemy by all poſſible means, or to ſubdue him by unmerited benefits, and by gentleneſs ſtrive to bring him to a ſenſe of his paſt injuſtice? Which

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is moſt adapted to beget and eſtabliſh peace, chearfulneſs, ſatisfaction, and comfort within us; a heart that is addicted to pride, to envy, to hatred, to anger, that is thrown into the moſt violent emotions at every affront, and filled with machinations and deſires of revenge; or a heart that is poſſeſſed by the ſincereſt affection towards all men, that is free from all diſorderly and furious paſſions, that has a prevalent propenſity to ſpare, to forgive, to do good? Which will be more willing and apt to perform great and diſintereſted actions, and to advance the public good without regard to his private advantage; he that is dazzled by arrogance, who exalts himſelf above his fellow-creatures, and never heſitates to ſacrifice the moſt ſacred laws of order and virtue to his imaginary honour, and his love of eaſe; or he who, becauſe he has a modeſt opinion of himſelf, and loves all men as his brethren, is conſtantly ready to ſerve them, and requires no other reward for his

his moſt conſiderable ſervices, than the approbation of God and his conſcience? Which will, in fine, ſhew himſelf more firm in misfortune; he who ſeeks his ſovereign good in the high-ſounding judgments men paſs on him, and in the reverence they ſhew to him, or to his rank, or to his riches; or he who holds the conſciouſneſs of his innocence and integrity, and the good pleaſure of the Supreme Exiſtence for the principal ſource of his happineſs? Certainly we ſhould judge very partially, we ſhould betray a ſordid and groveling mind, if we did not allow to the Chriſtian, who thinks and lives by the precepts of the Goſpel, the preference over the man of the world; or, if we could doubt of it, that the former is far more capable than the latter of elevating himſelf to true greatneſs of mind, of acquiring a permanent tranquillity of ſpirit, and of diſplaying the moſt immovable fortitude in every danger.

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This will be ſufficient for convincing you of the fallacy of the prejudices againſt Chriſtianity we have examined to-day. May it at the ſame time fill you with the profoundeſt reverence for it, and ſtrengthen you in the belief of its divine authority! But may it rouze you to obedience to its commands, and excite you to freſh ardour in the obſervance of them! What will it profit us, to be convinced of the fallacy of theſe prejudices, if we ſtill act ſo as if they were ſolid and true? What will it avail us, to confeſs the righteouſneſs, the reaſonableneſs, the excellency of the Chriſtian Morality, if we do not reduce it to practice? Will it not increaſe our guilt, and render the puniſhment of our diſobedience the more ſevere? Shall we not thus confirm the unbeliever in his oppoſition to the Chriſtian Religion, and ſupply him with freſh weapons for renewing his attacks? No; we will follow the ſagacity and the conviction of our underſtandings, as it is fitting

fitting for rational creatures to do. We will combat every prejudice, not only with our lips, but alſo by our whole deportment. We will refute them by actions, and ſhew by our own example, that it is not impoſſible to live up to the rules of the Goſpel; and that ſuch a life is not only honourable and beautiful in itſelf, but likewiſe promotes the perfection and happineſs of mankind. Should we find obſtacles and difficulties in the proſecution of theſe pious deſigns; then let us lift up our eyes to the glorious rewards we have to expect in that other world, and depend on the grace of the Moſt High, who is mightieſt in the feeble. The crown of life, the heritage of heaven, the eternal repoſe and delights of the bleſſed, are well worth our earneſt endeavours to obtain, our perſeverance to the end, as good ſoldiers of Chriſt. The farther we advance in virtue and piety; ſo much the eaſier and pleaſanter ſhall we find it. Our powers will be conſtantly

ſtantly increaſing by the practice of goodneſs; we ſhall proceed from conqueſt to conqueſt; we ſhall ever be drawing nearer to the glorious prize after which we ſtrive, and at length lay hold on the pearl of great price, to the poſſeſſion whereof God, through Chriſt, has called us.

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DIRECTIONS

FOR

LEARNING TO PRAY

FROM THE

HEART.

And it came to paſs, that as he was praying in a certain place, when he ceaſed, one of his diſciples ſaid unto him, Lord, teach us to pray, as John alſo taught his diſciples.

Luke xi. 1.

DIRECTIONS

FOR

LEARNING TO PRAY

FROM THE

HEART.

WE have on various occaſions diſcourſed to you on our obligation to prayer. We have ſhewn you how natural, how becoming, how uſeful and ſalutary it is, for rational creatures to humble themſelves in the preſence of their Creator, and to adore him; that guilty ſinners ſhould ſeek forgiveneſs of their Judge; that neceſſitous, feeble, corrupted men

ſhould implore the Almighty and the All-bountiful for help and ſupport; that creatures, in ſhort, whom God has bleſſed with ſo many benefits, whom he has ſo highly favoured in Chriſt, and to whom he has given ſuch glorious promiſes, ſhould appear before him with thankfulneſs and praiſe, and extol his never-ceaſing goodneſs. We have at the ſame time ſhewn you how our prayer ſhould be framed, and what pious ſentiments and feelings ſhould animate us therein, to render it agreeable to God, and profitable and comfortable to ourſelves. I am likewiſe aſſured of it, that we all, or, however, the greateſt part of us, acknowledge the juſtice and ſolidity of the reaſons that oblige us to prayer; and certainly no man will doubt, that our prayer ſhould be offered with piety, humility, ſincerity, ſeriouſneſs, and confidence, for rendering it an act of worſhip. But, now, do we act proportionably to our knowledge and our faith? Do we fulfill

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our duty in this matter, as is fitting for reaſonable creatures, and for Chriſtians? Does our heart incite us to prayer, or is it only our outward circumſtances that prompt us to it at times? Can we pray, and do we actually pray, often and with pleaſure? Have we made prayer an eaſy and pleaſant employment by reflection and practice? Indeed if nothing more were requiſite to this end, than to read or repeat certain formularies at certain times, not abſolutely without attention and devotion, then would every difficulty be removed that relates to the buſineſs. But we may eaſily perceive that a Chriſtian, who bears that name with propriety, and who determines not always to remain at the lowermoſt ſtep of knowledge and piety, cannot be contented with this. No; his duty and his own advantage require it of him, that he ſhould habituate himſelf to pray likewiſe from his own heart, or to deliver his prayers, his thankſgivings, his ſupplications to God, in his

own thoughts and words. But this appears very difficult to the generality of men, and frequently even to ſuch as actually have an earneſt deſire to pleaſe God; and the lively ſenſe of this difficulty prevents them from uſing the neceſſary pains for ſurmounting it. The difficulties, however, attendant on this matter are not ſo great as men commonly imagine. It conſiſts only in this, that a man earneſtly deſire to learn to pray from the heart, and that he employ the means and regulate the exerciſes that render us expert therein. He that does this, and continues it ſome time, will, by the divine aſſiſtance, infallibly reach his aim; and the utility and the pleaſure he will then receive from prayer, will richly compenſate him for all the pains he has beſtowed upon it. My preſent diſcourſe is deſigned to facilitate theſe pains to you as much as in me lies, and to ſmooth the way for you to the utility and pleaſure you may promiſe yourſelves from rational devotion.

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I am desirous to give you now some directions for learning to pray from the heart; that is, without prescribed forms, or prayers learnt by rote, to pray in your own thoughts and words. Receive and use this instruction with the same sincere docility in which the disciples of Jesus formerly came to their master, and said: "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." My institutes for learning to pray from the heart will consist of two principal articles. In the former I shall explain the manner and way wherein this is to be learnt, and how we are to acquire the habit of it, as well in general, as according to the various parts of prayer in particular; in the other I shall supply you with some rules of Christian prudence for facilitating the matter before us.

Would you learn to pray from the heart; then must you sedulously apply your thoughts to whatever relates to Religion, to

our ſouls, to our moral condition and our everlaſting ſalvation, and diligently exerciſe yourſelves in it. It is with theſe matters as with thoſe which relate to our outward condition and our worldly concerns. If you think but ſeldom and coldly on the affairs of your vocation, on your traffic, on your trade, on the ſciences or the arts you follow, on the connexions wherein you ſtand with other perſons; then will it be difficult for you to diſcourſe with others about them; difficult for you to aſk advice of your good friends on ſuch accidents as relate to them; difficult to expreſs your ſatisfaction at the ſucceſsful conſequences of your undertakings, and impart it to others; difficult to thank them for the aſſiſtance they have afforded, the wiſe counſel they have given, and the like. But if you think often on thoſe concerns, and heartily, and with great intereſt; if you ſeldom loſe them totally out of ſight; if you give them ſerious and continued conſideration on all occaſions; then is it not

eaſier for you to make your thoughts on them known to others, and then conſiſtently to apply to them with ſuch requeſts, thanks, or interceſſions, as relate to ſuch matters? Make the application of this to what concerns Religion, your duties, and your eternal happineſs. If you never, or but rarely think of theſe things, or if you think of them only in a deſultory manner, without continued attention, and only at times caſt on them a tranſient glance; then muſt you indeed find it difficult to make theſe matters the ſubject of your prayer, to converſe on them with God and yourſelf, and to do ſo with the earneſtneſs and devotion which the importance of the objects demands. Would you therefore facilitate this noble occupation to you; then accuſtom yourſelves to reflect on what moſt highly concerns you as rational creatures, as the ſubjects of God, as Chriſtians and heirs of a bleſſed immortality. Appropriate certain hours to it, when, remote from

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all temporal affairs and worldly diſtractions, you draw off your attention from outward, ſenſible things, and place it on ſuch as are ſpiritual, inviſible, and future. But then let not your thoughts range about in the regions of fancy, and paſs too rapidly from one object to another; for thus you will never acquire any conſiſtent knowledge of the matters on which your thoughts are employed, and they will make no deep and laſting impreſſion upon you, eſpecially as they are not things which we ſee, hear, or handle, but ſuch as we can only figure to the mind, and of the truth and certainty whereof we cannot ſo well be aſſured by ſentiment, as by argument and deduction. If then you would exerciſe yourſelf in Chriſtian meditation, and thereby render yourſelf expert in prayer; then ſet certain limits, as it were, to your ſpirit. Take ſome particular Doctrine, or ſome particular duty of Religion and Chriſtianity, before you. Read the paſſages of holy Scripture, wherein

wherein this doctrine, or this duty, is chiefly treated; or read a ſection of ſome good book, where theſe paſſages of Scripture are ſelected, elucidated, and applied. But miſtake not this reading for reflection. It is only to furniſh you with the materials or the ſuggeſtions thereto. Aſk yourſelf, as you read, and after having read: Do I underſtand now this doctrine? Do I comprehend all the words and expreſſions in which it is couched? Do I think ſomewhat clearly and determinately of it? Can I repeat what I think of it to others? And why do I believe this doctrine? What arguments have I for holding it to be true? How does this doctrine relate particularly to me? In what connection does it ſtand with my happineſs? Can it give me any comfort in afflictions, or any uſeful rule of conduct? Or can it clear up to me certain matters which have hitherto diſturbed and perplexed me? Is it a duty whereon you are reflecting; then aſk yourſelf: What

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am I obliged to, in my conduct, by this? In what particular incidents, on what occaſions, am I to do it? What muſt I at preſent impreſs on my memory and on my heart, that I may be able to do it at ſuch ſeaſons? Have I always done it hitherto, and what has generally hindered me from doing it? How can I, how muſt I remove theſe obſtructions out of the way? What did I then object to the juſtice and reaſonableneſs of this duty? Are theſe objections well-founded? Do they abſolve me from it? Will not the pains it may probably coſt me be afterwards amply repaid? &c. Thus muſt we in general accuſtom ourſelves to reflection. We can never be deficient in materials thereto. We have an extenſive field before us, where we conſtantly diſcover new beauties, gather new fruits, detect new treaſures, if we do but earneſtly ſeek them. God, his attributes, his works, his ways, his will; man, his nature, his faculties, his weakneſſes, his duties, his vocation,

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his preſent, his future condition; how important are all theſe objects! How fruitful in wiſe and pious, in uſeful and comfortable reflections, in ſentiments and ſenſations, to the Chriſtian, who learns to meditate upon them! and how apt muſt all this render him to whatever belongs to prayer! This inſtruction, however, is ſtill too general. We muſt deſcend to the particular parts of prayer. We muſt ſee how we are to exerciſe ourſelves by reflection and rational contemplation.

The firſt, and principal article of prayer, is the adoration and the praiſe of God. But this, at the ſame time, is the moſt difficult to many Chriſtians, who are deficient in knowledge and practice. At leaſt, it appears very difficult to many. How, it is ſaid, how can I, in my own words, and merely out of my own heart, adore my God who is ſo great and glorious? It is true, knowledge and reflection are requiſite thereto. But is not then this knowledge

to be acquired? Cannot every man exerciſe himſelf in this reflection? Are you deſirous of it, my friend; and if you have Religion at heart, you muſt of neceſſity be deſirous of it; then above all things conſider, what it is to adore and to praiſe God. Is it not to account God for what he is? to aſcribe to him the attributes, the prerogatives, the perfection, he poſſeſſes? to admire him for all theſe, and thence to feel and acknowledge the difference between him and us, as well as between him and the other creatures? Now, if I confeſs God to be eternal, almighty, omniſcient, ſupremely holy, righteous, good, gracious, clement, and faithful; if I, at the ſame time, feel how frail, how weak, how ignorant and fallible I am, and from this conſideration there ariſe in me an humble and reverential idea of his infinite greatneſs, then I adore him. Would you then adore the Moſt High; oh, then, ſtudy to underſtand him and his glory. Frequently interrogate

terrogate yourſelves, Who is God? Who am I? What prerogatives has God above me, and above all other things that are without him? Is he not almighty, ſupremely wiſe, ſupremely good? &c. In what relation does he ſtand towards me and all the world? Is he not my Creator, and theirs? my Preſerver, my Benefactor, my Lord and Judge, and theirs? But take eſpecial heed, that you do not ſtop at theſe general ideas, or rather at theſe words which expreſs general ideas; otherwiſe you run the hazard of thinking but little or not at all about them. Rather ſtrive to be acquainted with the particular demonſtrations of the omnipotence, of the wiſdom, of the gooodneſs, of the glory of God, in the creation, in providence, in the redemption, which you will find in yourſelf and in all things around you. Seek out of the particular traces of theſe attributes of God; repreſent them

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circumſtantially and ſtrikingly to your mind; and, that you may not loſe yourſelf in theſe ſpacious and inexplorable regions, you muſt here ſet certain bounds to your attention. Think one while upon this, and then again on the other particular attribute of God; now on this, and then on the other particular diſplay of it: thus will your repreſentations of it be clear and perſpicuous; they will make impreſſion on your heart, and produce in you ſentiments of admiration, of humility, and awe. If you do this, and frequently return to theſe exerciſes of rational devotion, it will certainly not ſeem difficult to you to expreſs theſe thoughts and ſentiments in your own words; and when you have exhauſted your own reflections, you will at one time exclaim with the Pſalmiſt, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! in wiſdom haſt thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches." At another, you will ſay with the Prophet, "The Lord is the true God! he

he is the living God, and an everlaſting king! he hath made the earth by his power, he hath eſtabliſhed the world by his wiſdom, and hath ſtretched out the heavens by his diſcretion: and, at another, break forth into the heavenly anthem: "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory, and hohour, and power; for thou haſt created all things, and for thy pleaſure they are, and were created! Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; juſt and true are thy ways, thou King of Saints!" And this is adoration of God, this is offering him praiſe. Certainly a noble, a bleſſed, an eaſy employment to him that knows God, and exerciſes himſelf in reflections on his glory!

The ſecond article of prayer is thankſgiving for the good we have received from God, or the teſtifying of our joy on account of it, and our readineſs to do the will of our benefactor, and to return him

love for love. Would we acquit ourſelves of this duty to God in a rational manner; would we give ſcope to our own feelings on the ſubject, and expreſs theſe feelings in our own words: then muſt we in like manner exerciſe ourſelves in reflection; in reflection on things, the conſideration of which cannot but be agreeable to us. We muſt accuſtom ourſelves to take notice of all the inſtances of divine goodneſs and mercy we have experienced, and are conſtantly experiencing. We muſt enumerate the whole wealth of benefits and goods which we poſſeſs as men, as Chriſtians, as members of domeſtic and civil ſociety; expatiate one while upon this, and then upon other parts of it; and bear in mind, the neceſſity, the high value, and the great utility of the goods we have received of God. Life, health, faculties, education, and inſtruction; agreeable and uſeful connexions with other men; good effects of our labour and induſtry; events particularly

larly fortunate to the State and to the Church; knowledge of God; forgiveneſs of ſins; ability to do good; abſtinence from evil; preſervation from dangerous deviations; hope of eternal life: all this, and ſtill much more, belong to the catalogue of divine benefits, for which we are to teſtify our joy and gratitude to the Moſt High. We muſt therefore frequently recollect them in ſilence, attend to the ſources from whence they flow, and conſider how much they contribute to our preſent and future happineſs. We muſt compare our condition with the condition of thoſe who are more or leſs deſtitute of theſe advantages. We muſt ſay to ourſelves: "What am I indebted for to God, as my Creator, as my Redeemer; what in regard to my temporal, in regard to my ſpiritual life, in regard to my outward condition? How manifold, how great, are the goods I have received from him, and ſtill daily receive! How unhappy ſhould I be, had I not ſuch or

ſuch other capacities, faculties, and advantages! How happy am I now, that I poſſeſs, and not only poſſeſs, but alſo may uſe and enjoy them! Have I however merited them? Have I them as a due I might require from God? Are they not pure effects of his free grace and mercy?" When we do but ſpecify ſuch conſiderations as theſe, and then feel, for inſtance, the value of health, or call to mind the many comforts and ſatisfactions we enjoy by means of health, and the variety of uſeful and important matters it enables us to perform: ſhall we truly find it hard to lift up our heart to God, and ſay, "Praiſed be thy goodneſs, O Lord, that thou not only cauſeſt me to live, but alſo to enjoy my life; that thou granteſt me to employ my bodily and mental powers unobſtructed and with good effects, and to do what I ought to do with pleaſure and joy. Oh! how can I better thank thee for theſe mercies, than by applying my health and my

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powers as is agreeable to thee and uſeful to my brethren!" When we farther acknowledge the abundance of the grace which God evinces towards us, in bringing us to the knowledge of himſelf and of his Son; can it then truly ſeem hard to us, to expreſs our joy on the occaſion, and to teſtify it by theſe or ſimilar words: "How happy am I, O God, that I know thee, and Jeſus Chriſt whom thou haſt ſent; that I underſtand to what end thou haſt created and ordained me, and what I muſt do to obtain thy favour! How happy, in knowing that thou art gracious to me for the ſake of thy Son; and that, if I believe in him, love and obey him, thou wilt raiſe me to a bleſſed immortality! How could I have ſought and found the way to truth and virtue, how have known it to be the path of true felicity! how could I have calmed my ſpirit both in life and death, if this light had not enlightened me, if I had not been favoured with this conſolation and this

hope! Yes, O my God, to thee and to thy gracious revelation am I indebted for all theſe ineſtimable benefits. To uſe them aright ſhall be my conſtant, my moſt important concern. If we reflect, in fine, how frequently we have gone aſtray, to what dangers we have thus been expoſed, and how affectionately God has called us back by his word, by the ways of his providence, by certain particularly remarkable and affecting events, and brought us again to the path of virtue; can it then truly be hard for us to praiſe God for his long-ſuffering, his patience, his veracity, and ſtruck with ſentiments of gratitude, to ſay to him, "O Lord, O merciful God, thou haſt pitied me as a father; thou haſt ſnatched me from ruin; thou haſt brought me to a ſight of my follies, when I had forgotten thee and my duties, when I had allowed ſin to have the dominion over me, and haſt reſtored me again to freedom! Without thy grace and thy providence, I had been a

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prey to my luſts, and a ſpoil to corruption! To thee I conſecrate anew my life; I am thine, for thou haſt redeemed me, O Lord, thou God of truth!" And even ſo the matter ſtands with all other inſtances of divine benignity. Only form lively images of them to your minds; call to remembrance all the circumſtances that enhance their value; enjoy all the benefits you poſſeſs, in a view to God, from whom they ſpring: then will you find it both eaſy and pleaſant to give the praiſes due for them to your infinite benefactor, and you will ſtand in need of no foreign aſſiſtance in this natural and bleſſed employment.

The third article of prayer, is the perſonal petitions we put up to God, for all the requiſites to our happineſs. How peculiarly eaſy muſt this part of prayer be to a reaſonable man, to a not abſolutely ignorant and unfeeling Chriſtian! Who is ſo perfect, who is ſo happy, as to have no

more deſires and aſpirations after a higher degree of perfection and happineſs? Who is there that is ſenſible to any defect or to any affliction, and is not ready to addreſs him for the ſupply of this defect, or the removal of this affliction; to him who he knows is able and diſpoſed to do for him that which he wiſhes? At the ſame time no difficulties here occur, but ſuch as may be overcome by reflection. If we would have our petitions reaſonable and agreeable to God; if we would have them earneſt and ſincere, and unleſs they be ſo we cannot promiſe ourſelves that they will be received: then muſt we obſerve the two following particulars. We muſt, above all things, ſtudy to know ourſelves and our real wants. We muſt endeavour to form juſt conceptions of happineſs, and to diſtinguiſh what is requiſite and neceſſary thereto, from what does not peculiarly belong to it, but can only occaſionally contribute ſomewhat to it. To this end, we

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muſt conſider ourſelves, not only as creatures endowed with animal life, who are to live but a ſhort time here on earth; but as creatures who have a rational and an immortal ſpirit, and are capable of an everlaſting happineſs. We muſt revolve in our mind all that is in this reſpect worthy of our deſire, and diſcriminate the neceſſity and the utility of it. We muſt reflect on our various obligations, and conſider how far we fulfil them, and how far we come ſhort. We muſtfrequently aſk ourſelves: "Which can I leaſt diſpenſe with to my happineſs, the grace of God, or the favour of mankind? periſhing riches, or the permament treaſure of good works? the health of this terrene body, or the health of my immortal ſoul? the approbation of men, or the approbation of God and my conſcience? Which is the greateſt of all the dangers that threaten me; the danger of loſing my honour, my property, my life; or the danger of ſinning, of perſiſting in

ſin, and ſo to diſpleaſe God, and to make ſhip-wreck of ſalvation? Which of the virtues am I moſt deficient in? Which of my duties do I moſt frequently tranſgreſs? What is particularly wanting to me for worthily bearing the name of a Chriſtian, and for promiſing myſelf the reward of it with full aſſurance in the future world?" Have we acquired this information; then muſt we endeavour likewiſe to feel our wants, our defects, our weakneſs. We muſt figure to ourſelves in a lively manner the neceſſity of the divine grace and aſſiſtance. We muſt think: "How can I be happy, if God be not gracious to me, and will not forgive me my ſins? How can I ſtand in the hour of temptation, if he do not guard and ſupport me? How can I do my duty, if he do not grant me ability and ſuccour?" If we diſpoſe ourſelves to ſuch conſiderations, and ſuch emotions are excited in us, we ſhall certainly have inducement and inclination enough to preſent

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our petitions to God in a manner agreeable to him. All that relates merely to our outward welfare, we ſhall entirely ſubmit to him and his wiſdom; and in this reſpect deſire nothing of him, but that he would grant us, according to his wiſe beneficence, what is actually uſeful and ſalutary to us, whether it be according to our wiſhes, or in direct oppoſition to them. But, for his grace and the forgiveneſs of our ſins, for preſerving us from moral evil, for ability in moral goodneſs, for growth in knowledge, in faith, and in virtue, for a truly Chriſtian and pious heart, for a comfortable expectation of the bleſſedneſs of heaven; for ſuch ſolid and laſting goods as theſe, we ſhall ſupplicate God with the utmoſt ardour of deſire: and the lively ſentiment of the neceſſity and infinite value of theſe goods, will teach us far better how to aſk them, than any preſcribed form or ritual whatever can do.

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The laſt article of prayer is interceſſion, whereby we manifeſt our participation in whatever relates to our fellow-creatures, and implore for them the grace, the bleſſing, and the aſſiſtance of the Moſt High. Would we render ourſelves expert therein; then muſt we often call to mind our manifold and cloſe connexions with the reſt of mankind. We muſt circumſtantially repreſent to ourſelves, at times, their various conditions, their ſpiritual and corporeal wants, and endeavour to ſupport and ſtrengthen in us the ſentiments of benevolence and friendſhip we owe them. We muſt often enter upon theſe or the like conſiderations. All mankind are my brethren; they have the ſame wants, the ſame defects, the ſame infirmities, that I have; they are liable to the ſame dangers to which I am expoſed. Many, ah! probably the generality of them, are ſtill more indigent, more feeble, more wretched than I. Here I perceive whole nations ſtill ſitting in the thick-

thickeſt darkneſs of barbariſm, of idolatry, and ſuperſtition, and know not the way of ſalvation. There I behold others to whom indeed the Goſpel is delivered, but delivered with ſo many additions as deprive it not a little of its beauty and effect. How many of my brethren are ignorant, unbelieving, blinded by error and hurtful prejudices! How many are ſlaves to their ſordid luſts and paſſions! How many are doubtful, and ever fluctuating between virtue and vice, between God and the world, between heaven and earth? How many find themſelves, at this very moment perhaps, beſet by temptations, to the combating whereof a quite peculiar degree of fortitude and courage is ſcarcely equal! How many ſigh under the oppreſſion of the mighty of the earth, or under the burden of poverty and diſtreſs, or under the ſentiment of violent pain! How many are now ſtruggling with death, and ſhuddering at the thoughts

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of judgment and eternity! Oh! if we frequently dwelt on ſuch conſiderations as theſe, would it ſeem hard to us to fulfil the duty of interceſſion for all men? Would it ſeem hard to us to pour out the deſires of our heart before God, that he would graciouſly pleaſe to diſpell, by the light of truth, the darkneſs which ſtill covers the greateſt part of the globe; that he would enlarge and extend the kingdom of his Son, deſtroy unbelief and ſuperſtition, and diminiſh the authority of vice; that he would enlighten the ignorant, amend the vicious, bring the wandering back, ſupport the tempted, confirm the doubtful and irreſolute in faith and virtue, relieve the oppreſſed and the wretched, ſuccour the afflicted, and conſole the dying? If we do not this; if we do not know how to pray for our neighbour: then, either a want of reflection, or a groſs indifference in regard to the well-being of our brother, muſt of neceſſity be the cauſe of it. Strive

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to remove this obſtruction out of the way, and you will ſoon comply with this duty without feeling reluctance; you will perform it with inward delight. Would you, for example, pray for your teachers, or for the magiſtrate; then figure to yourſelf circumſtantially, how many and how ſevere are the duties incumbent on the teacher and on the magiſtrate; how much wiſdom and intelligence, how much fortitude and integrity, are requiſite to the diſcharge of theſe duties, and how many impediments and difficulties they meet with, no leſs in their own infirmity than in outward things, in ſatisfying the demands of their office and vocation, at all times, and in all reſpects. Repreſent to yourſelf the neceſſity and the manifold uſefulneſs of the magiſtracy and the miniſtry; conſider the advantage reſulting from order, of ſecurity, of quiet, of inſtruction, of internal comfort, for which you are indebted to them; and compare it with the dread-

dreadful evils which the abolition of theſe ſtates, or a deficiency of worthy perſons to fill them, would occaſion in human ſociety: ſo, certainly, you will never feel either a want of incitement, or of ſubject, to your interceſſions for your guides and ſuperiors in ſpiritual and temporal ſtations. And theſe are the grand rules and exerciſes we have to lay down and obſerve in regard to the various parts of prayer, if we are deſirous of learning to pray from the heart.

Before I conclude, allow me to add, in few words, ſome particular precepts of Chriſtian prudence for facilitating this employment.

As far as you are able, never enter upon prayer, without ſome previous preparation, ſhorter or longer according to circumſtances. Collect your mind from diſtractions reduce it to tranquillity and ſilence. Begin by reading in the word of God, or a paſ-

a paſſage from ſome edifying book, or ſome animating parts of our liturgy, for compoſing your attention, and fixing it on the objects that are now to employ you. Aſk yourſelf: What am I now proceeding to do? With whom am I going to converſe? What am I in want of? What do I deſire? In what particular circumſtances do I now find myſelf? What materials for prayer can I collect from the juſt paſt or the juſt approaching time? Into what temptations may I probably fall to-day? What buſineſs have I to provide for to-day? With what kind of perſons am I to have intercourſe with to-day? What particular benefits has God vouchſafed me this day, or this week? What faults and ſins have I been guilty of within this time? Of what muſt I peculiarly beware, what muſt I do, that I may not commit them again? &c.

Farther: do not imagine that a prayer, to render it acceptable to God, muſt be

neceſſarily diffuſive, or that it muſt always comprize in due order all that relates to it, even in the minuteſt circumſtances. Moſt of the forms of prayer we meet with in the Holy Scriptures are ſhort and of various contents, and even the model is ſo framed which Jeſus gave his diſciples. Now you are chiefly buſied in the adoration and praiſe of God, then in thankſgiving for his benefits; one moment employed in praying for grace and help, at another in interceſſion for others.

Yet more: think not that choice expreſſions merely, or that a certain artificial eloquence, is requiſite for praying to God in an acceptable manner. No; here ſincerity and earneſtneſs are the material concerns. We have to do with a God, who looks not at acceſſaries, which are not perhaps in our power, but only at the heart of him that prays.

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Are you ſubject to diſtractions herein; then, to preſerve yourſelf from them, pray in an audible, or rather, to avoid all appearance of hypocriſy, in an articulate voice, not merely in thoughts, but in words diſtinctly expreſſed. In this deſign, at times make uſe of good forms of prayer, that you may have ſomething before you, on which you may fix your attention. But firſt read over theſe forms, merely for inſtruction, as you read any other edifying piece. Strive thoroughly to underſtand every ſentiment and term they contain; compare them carefully with your preſent condition; alter them, either in your mind or upon paper, ſo as to adapt them to your particular wants and occaſions; make them by this means your own; in the uſe of them pay more regard to the matter than to the words: and do not too frequently make uſe of the very ſame form, leſt it become too familiar to you and ſlip through your mind without obſervance, and you

repeat a cuſtomary ſeries of words to which you pay little or no attention.

Laſtly, do not content yourſelf with praying at certain ſtated times. This is doubtleſs highly proper and neceſſary; but it is not poſſible that we ſhould always be exactly at theſe ſtated times in that frame of mind which is moſt favourable to devotion. Whenever therefore you are ſure of this frame of mind ſo favourable to devotion, then exerciſe yourſelf in prayer, unleſs ſome other duty of greater importance call you away. Eſpecially have recourſe to prayer as often as any particular doctrine of Religion has made a deeper impreſſion than ordinary upon you; when you feel your weakneſs and the neceſſity of the grace and aſſiſtance of God in a more forcible manner than uſual; when you are in any particular trouble; when you are affected by any particular inſtance of God's goodneſs; or when you perceive, more plainly than at other times,

times, the value of ſome good you have long poſſeſſed, and feel a more lively joy on its account. At ſuch times you will moſt readily pour out your heart in the preſence of God. At ſuch times you will find a charm in theſe acts of worſhip; they will become pleaſant to you; you will acquire a greater aptitude in them: and this charm, this aptitude, will put you in a condition more eaſily to obviate any hindrances to devotion you may meet with at other times; and at length you will advance ſo far, that, according to the precept of the Apoſtle, you will pray without ceaſing; that is, you will on all occaſions elevate your heart to God with joy and confidence, and thus maintain an uninterrupted communication with him; a ſtate, which is the neareſt way to perfection and happineſs, and after which we can never too zealouſly ſtrive.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.